

DISCOVERING THE STUDENT, DISCOVERING THE SELF



ENGLISH 100

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Department of English and Modern Languages

Missouri Western State University

Introduction: Dawn Terrick

The essays that appear in this publication were selected by the English 100 Committee from submissions from English 100 students from the Spring and Fall 2014 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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English 100 – Introduction to College Writing

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A Change of Heart

Jamela Griffin

The majority of children in today's society don't know how to read. It's not that children don't know how to read, but that they can't comprehend what they read. You can read a book and still not know what the story was about. Children who grow up in homes where books and reading aren't heavily enforced struggle with this often. This leaves a big impact on their ability to strive in school. Teachers make learning harder for these students by providing learning material that doesn't catch the interest of the child. In the story of "The Lonely, Good Company of Books" by Richard Rodriguez, he proves that you can read a lot to gain knowledge, but still not comprehend the reading. Just like Rodriguez, I had trouble comprehending the reading until I got the help I needed to understand.

Parents don't encourage their children to read in the homes which causes the child to not know the importance. Growing up, reading was not enforced and was only done for homework and at school. My parents didn't keep books around the house. We had all magazines of all kinds like Vibe, XXL, Ebony, People, and Vogue. I would look at the magazines for all the pictures and ads. My parents did not look at them and would always let me rip them up. The only reading my parents did is when they had a bill or something to sign, or to help me with my homework. Rodriguez parents didn't enforce reading in his home growing up either. He expressed, "For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible" (293). Both Richard and my parents only read when they had to and didn't give us the importance of reading as a child. If I had the knowledge of the importance of reading as a child more, I would have cherished reading more.

At a young age both Rodriguez and I had awful experiences with reading. In 1st grade, I had a teacher named Mrs. Spider. She was an old wrinkled white lady, with a distinctive voice that was low. She was mean too. During story time, everyone had a copy of the short stories she was reading. We would popcorn read around the class which is when the teacher picks a person randomly to read. I didn't talk much in the class so when she picked me to read I would read slowly and stumble on my words. The other kids would laugh and Mrs. Spider would get mad because she thought I was trying to be funny. This made me embarrassed to read and I didn't like to read for a long time. And I stuck to not liking to read. In 6th grade, reading was a little more enforced. We picked a chapter book of our choice. We had to read for homework and write down how many minutes we read for homework and each week after completing a chapter we right a summary on each chapter. Then we had a book report about the whole book after we were finished. Doing my summaries, my English teacher noticed I needed help because I could never really give a full understanding of what happened in each chapter. She made me take a reading test called the SRI and my score was low. I was put in a class called Literary Skills to help me with reading. Everyday going to the class I would be angry. Why am I in this class? I can read words I thought to myself. I would not accept that fact that I had problems reading. Rodriguez had similar complications with reading such as I did. Rodriguez reveals, "I needed 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...." (294). Rodriguez later declared, "Shortly after, remedial reading classes were arranged for me with a very old nun" (294). We both were put into a reading class to get the help we needed. It was only for the good because we needed to get the skills of reading.

My Literary Skills teacher did a satisfying job on teaching me to improve my reading just like the nun that helped Rodriguez. Her name was Mrs. Smith, an older lady but had a kind, loving heart. She gave the students a lot of personal and one on one time. During our one on one time in the back corner of the class room, she gave me a book to read to her out loud. Reading the book I read slow and still stumbled my words and when I came to words I didn't know, I would skip over. She stopped me and told me when I came to words I didn't know use a dictionary. She would sometimes read to me with fluency and when she read she made it seem as she was the character telling the story. Rodriguez had a nun he met with after school every day for 6 months to read in a small storage like room. During the sessions they had together, they would take turns reading. Rodriguez revealed, "Playfully she ran through complex sentences, calling the words alive with her voice, making it seem

that the author somehow was speaking directly to me” (294). When someone else reads to you, you understand the text better. But you have to learn to read on your own. Rodriguez, after the lessons with the nun, was scared to read alone. The nun expressed that he could do it and reading will open up a new world for him. Rodriguez had grown a passion for reading. He read all the time and loved it. It became a hobby for him. When Rodriguez got older, he noticed he read a lot of books and liked books, but was still not a good reader. He mentions, “In various ways, books brought me academic success as I hoped that they would. But I was not a good reader. Merely bookish, I lacked a point of view when I read” (296). Rodriguez gained knowledge to boost his vocabulary, but when he read but still wasn’t comprehending the story. This is a common issue that happens with most children including myself.

Finally, we both enjoyed reading. The Literary Skills class helped me when I read to gain knowledge but not comprehend. In Literary Skills I learned a lot to use the context clues to find a new word, main idea, theme, and tone of a story. It helped me to get out of literary skills but it didn’t make me a good reader. I was still not interested in reading and still didn’t see the importance because the other 2 years in middle schools and all through high school we didn’t read as much and never read anything that interested me. It wasn’t until college I learned a very important skill to teach me both to gain knowledge and comprehend. I was put into a course called reading 095. I was very mad and upset because I have been through this before in 6th grade. I thought I had all the skills down of reading. In the class I learned the same thing as in literary skills in high school, but I learned an important trick called the mini SQ3R (Survey, Question, and Read, Recite, and Review) every time I read. This helped me out a lot. When I read I understood clearly what the passage meant and I didn’t use this method for just English class but all my other classes too. In English class we were assigned a book called The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore. We didn’t read the book together as a class. This was the first time I read a book on my own. When I read the book I grew to like it because I understood the book so well I used everything I learned about reading when I read the book. I finally experienced a good book by reading on my own. Rodriguez enjoyed reading on weekends in the morning he would read in his bed, or go to the public library. If the weather was nice he would go to a park and read. Rodriguez expressed, “In spite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books” (296). Once you learn the skills of reading you will enjoy reading and want to read more.

Not everyone is a good reader. You can read words but not comprehend the passage. There is help for you to learn how to read. If the children don’t get the help they need, children will continue to not read books, especially if no one shows them the importance of reading. Parents need to enforce reading in the home more. Teachers need to get books that interest a child to engage them to want to read. Excelling at reading is a great tool to have; this will help children succeed. In “The Lonely, Good Company of Books” by Richard Rodriguez, he proves you can read and not comprehend. Both Rodriguez and I didn’t have parents that enforced reading in our homes which caused us not to do so well reading. Rodriguez got some help with reading, but he still wasn’t getting the point of view when he read. Sometimes you may need extra help to get to where you need to be. There is nothing wrong with admitting you need help with reading. Rodriguez and I went through obstacles reading, but we managed to make it through, and we finally enjoyed reading.

A Cry for Help

By Prince Chuck Mosley

"You stupid bitch! Where is my money?" The sounds of the yelling man woke me in the middle of the night. I walked in to the living room to see what the commotion was, to see my mother laying on the ground with a bloody nose and being kicked and punched repeatedly. She owed her drug dealer ten dollars. At the time I was only 11 years old and did not know what to do to get this bad man off of my mother. It was at this point my grandmother made a decision that would change my life forever in some ways good because I would learn the value of education and in some ways bad because I lost my way in the house for a while. She chose to move to public housing in an upper middle class town. This house helped shape me into the person I am today, because it instilled in me the values of education and the importance of family above everything else. The house answered my cry for help. I have always had a great relationship with my family, but the house really brought us together.

From the time I was young my mother was battling a horrible crack addiction. Even though she was physically there for my sister and me, she was always distant. She would always make sure that we had everything we needed before she went to get her "medicine." She would take us to my grandmother's senior citizen apartment building and tell us she would be back in a couple of hours. However, that was not always the case. Sometimes she would be gone for days to weeks at a time. This left my sister and me there, always waiting for the one person we could count on to give us the love and nurturing that every child needs, but there never seemed to be enough. During those years my mother constantly tried to move to get us away from the drug that was destroying her life. Every year we would have to move again never really having a place we could call home. By the time I was 11, I had already attended 7 different schools, trying to get away from a problem that always seemed to edge its way into my mother's life. At this point my mother stood back and looked at the situation and decided that the unstable life she was providing for her children was not okay. My grandmother and mother sat down with an attorney to grant temporary custody to my grandmother. This prompted my grandmother to start a new life with her grandchildren so we packed our belongings and moved into a new home.

The new house gave my grandmother the opportunity to be the change my sister and I needed in our lives. She found a small public assisted house in the middle class town of Millstadt. This house would change me in so many different ways. The house sat on a dead end street with only five other houses on the block. At the end of the street was a beautiful nature park. The street was appropriately named Pine Street as the entire street was lined with enormous pine trees. The house was not extremely large but it was more than enough to call home. It was a single story brick house with a large yard and attached garage. The main entrance led in to the living room where my sister and I would watch our one hour allotted television time during the school week. Going to the right led into the kitchen where I would learn how to cook for myself during the years my grandmother suffered from crippling depression. Going to the right from the living room led to the two bed rooms of the house -- one for my grandmother the other was shared between my sister and I.

This house offered me shelter unlike anything I had ever dreamed of. The general point of a house is to shelter one from the outdoors. This house gave me so much more; it gave me a sense of security knowing that home was actually a house and not my mother's car parked in an overnight parking spot. I had my own bed to sleep in every night, something I did not have in every house I lived in. We had food to eat when we wanted and did not have worry that my grandmother would not be able to eat because there was not enough the way it happened so often with my mother. I finally felt like I was truly at home, a feeling I had never had before.

The house gave my family a second chance to correct past mistakes. My grandmother knew she had obviously made mistakes with the raising of her children, and she was determined not to make the same mistakes with her grandchildren now that she was our temporary caregiver. She stressed education over everything, something that was never put on the front burner for a kid who sometimes had to worry about where

his next meal would be coming from. So when I started fifth grade that year she made sure I was in bed by 8:30. This would be the first time in my life I actually had a bed on a bed frame. My sister and I divided the room with a tall dresser that had been given to us from a local charity. My bed sat on the left side of the room and my sister's on the right along with a desk. The bed became a place for me to sit back and think about my life. In that bedroom I developed my love for reading. Even though I had to be in bed by 8:30 on school nights, my grandmother would allow another 45 minutes for reading in my bedroom.

The house allowed an informal family time every day after school. The moment I walked in the house from school it was straight to the kitchen for a snack and my homework, and even though my grandmother could not usually help me with my homework when I needed it, she always made sure that I had the resources needed to learn the information as best as possible. The kitchen had a large dining table where I would sit to do my homework and talk about my day and how everything was going in my life. It was these moments that I would receive some of my grandmother's best advice about life and the choices she had made. Those days in the kitchen would become valuable family time for us to educate ourselves and build relationships with not only each other but also the house by having a place I felt secure and comfortable. Growing up, I never really had someone tell me how important school was, but my grandmother sat me down during my homework sessions after school and informed me how severe my mother's problem truly was. She explained that if my sister and I ever wanted to be able to have a stable home we would have to create that for ourselves and education would be the only way to achieve this goal.

Being in this house set the foundations for me to lead a successful school career. Within that first year of living with my grandmother, I went from being a student who got mostly C's and D's to a straight A student. I went in to my sixth, seventh, and eighth grade years being placed in advanced math and science classes. This was all because for once in my life I was in a home where everything seemed stable and perfect. I finally felt that I was in the right place at the right time everything was perfect, so I thought.

The house granted me the hope I needed to carry on with life. However, two years into the new house I felt that something was all of a sudden missing again. That missing part of my life proved to be my mother. Although this was the first time I truly had place to call home, it was also the first time I had to go such a long time without seeing my mother. It was heartbreaking to think that I was doing so well, but my mother was still losing an uphill battle. The house gave me the strength I needed in this time of doubt, because I knew that my mother was working hard to get herself straight. The house was the hope I needed, because I knew when my mother was better, we, as a family, would have our own place to call home.

My cry for help was answered in multiple ways. I finally had a home where I felt safe, and my grandmother instilled the importance of education in me. It house gave me hope to keep dreaming about the day I would have the same kind of place with my mother. Most importantly my grandmother's house provided much needed shelter both physical and mental. The summer before my freshman year I moved back in with my mother who had begun to complete her nursing degree. This point in my life was truly perfect because my mother was well. If it had not been for that house I would not be in college right now with a bright future ahead of me. I am a walking testament that one special place in someone's life can truly change the person they are and determine who they become. From this house, I truly learned the meaning of "there is no place like home."

My cry for help was answered in multiple ways. I finally had a home where I felt safe, and my grandmother instilled the importance of education in me. The house gave me hope to keep dreaming about the day I would have the same kind of place with my mother. Most importantly my grandmother's house provided much needed shelter both physical and mental. The summer before my freshman year I moved back in with my mother who had begun to complete her nursing degree. This point in my life was truly perfect because my mother was well. If it had not been for that house I would not be in college right now with a bright future ahead of me. I am a walking testament that one special place in someone's life can truly change the person they are and determine who they become. From this house I truly learned the meaning of "there is no place like home."

A Mother's Influence

By Kenya Williams

As a child in preschool, little kids everywhere are working on their art projects for their mothers. May was fastly approaching and they're all anxious for their mothers to see what they had created. The truth was if their mothers didn't like it, the children would never know because their mothers want to see their kids strive for greatness. Mothers are the motivating forces in our lives. In the essay "*The Love of Books*," by Gloria Naylor, she knows her mother was the reason she loved books the way she did. For Naylor and I, our mothers were contributing factors in our reading and writing success. Without them we would have not been as fluent as we are today.

Naylor and I spent a lot of times as a child in the library, due to not having a lot of money to buy books. Naylor's mother grew up in the south with little to no resources. She made two dollars a month and spent it on books. Her mother refused to raise her children in those conditions. Now living New York, the library was their go to place. Naylor states, "And my mother believed that books taught the young how to dream" (227). Her mother was very wise and gave her good life lessons. In New York, children couldn't get a library card until the child could write their names on the card. This was an additional motivator for Gloria to get to reading. Naylor states, "Because we grew up without much money and a whole lot of dreams, we spent a great deal of time in the public libraries" (227). This shows her mother believed that regardless of the circumstances, knowledge is power. To make a change and to have to get on a higher educational level, you must read in order to gain success through the educational system. Naylor states, "I had to get much older to understand why she took us on those pilgrimages. While indeed it was to educate us, I think it was also to heal some place within herself. For me, it made the library a place that was quite familiar, a place that was even welcoming" (227). Her mother needed the library just as much as she persuaded her children to love it. Likewise, I went through the similar things as Naylor. As a child, the Julia Davis Library was no strange place to me. It felt like a second home, especially when my mother was finishing school. Like Naylor, we weren't very fortunate. My mother was firm believer of knowledge is power. So while she was in school her number one goal was to make sure I excelled in school. The library was a place where she could unwind and get her work done. On the other side of the library, which was decorated like a jungle, was my favorite place. This side of the library was the largest corner. It had what seemed like thousands of bean bags and colorful ribbons hanging from the ceiling. I was opened up to another world where I could be myself. I read at least three books every day we went. When checking out books I always had to pick between six books and was very upset when I couldn't take more. Naylor and I have surpassed all stereotypes. We have proved with reading you can beat the standard images people have created for our neighborhoods. The value of the library was instilled in us at a young age, which contributes to our love for reading.

Journaling is a way to express yourself and a way to explain what you are feeling. Naylor was a shy child in school. Although she never talked, Gloria excelled in school subjects that contained reading and writing. So her mother did what she could to get her daughter better at communication. Naylor's mother states, "Gloria, I'll bet there are a lot of things going on in the world you don't understand and I'm sure there are even things going on in here in our home that might troubling you, but since you can't seem to talk to your father and me about these thing, why don't you write them down in here." (228). Naylor's mother didn't realize she was starting Naylor's career with this one little diary. From there on out writing was her first love. When I was younger writing became a very close friend to me as well. My mother bought me a journal when I was younger and instructed me to write anything. From there on out I wrote about everything like what happened at school, church, and home. I wrote my personal stories such as what happened at school during my grandmother's passing or how I wished my father came around. My mother encouraged me to write about my feelings regarding my father. She believed it would help me get over that situation. While writing I realized after a hard day I felt released and ready to let go of hurt and anger. Naylor and I are similar in the fact that our mothers pushed us to write. We wrote our problems in the journals our mothers gave us and started our personal healing processes.

Writing took the reins of our lives when we found ourselves writing for pleasure. Naylor found herself intrigued by African American female writers. Naylor states, "I normally reach for a poem called "The Unclaimed," by Nikky Finney, a young African- American woman" (226). Naylor felt a real connection with this artist and wanted to emulate her. In the sense of how much they were respected and the power it had. Naylor states, "My first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, literally began that very semester at Brooklyn College when I discovered that there was a whole history of black writers in America" (230). Naylor was influenced heavily by other black females. When Naylor was young these women whom she looked up to were not given credit. So she didn't think it was common to be a writer. Like Naylor, I only wrote about things that I was interested in. Many things I wrote were song lyrics. It didn't matter if they were mine or others, I wrote them anyway. Writing the songs improved my reading a great deal. I now was responsible for reading what I wrote. I admired the powerful lyrics from artists like Kirk Franklin, Chrisette Michele, and Mary Mary. These are key people whom inspired me. I wanted to be just like them and write songs that hopefully had an impact on the nation's lives. Naylor and I were pushed to write by our mothers and inspired by famous people to start our own work.

Mothers have been a key part in Naylor's and my success. In the essay "*The Love of Books*," by Gloria Naylor, we learn that it took her mother pushing her into writing. Without the help of her mother Naylor may have never started writing. Like Naylor, I am truly passionate about reading and writing. Naylor and I realized that your writing should touch people's heart and give them a sense of why they read your work. Everyone has a different story on how they learned to read and write. Some people had it harder than others or vice versa, but the key is to learn no matter how long it takes.

Against All Odds

By Susan Kirsch

My older sister and I are polar opposites; Julie was the gutsy one, rebelling and taking chances. We had a love-hate relationship growing up as most sisters do, which spilled over into adulthood. Looking back, I can see I was envious of her because she seemed to get what she wanted. When my sister would set her mind to do something, she did it despite the obstacles, and always-always was in some kind of trouble. This strong independent drive that kept her in trouble was the same force that gave her the strength to face the challenges ahead, as she made the decision to return to college in her mid-thirties. Julie continually persevered in spite of obstacles, such as contracting breast cancer, and maintained a positive attitude until finally reaching her goal. In the process, she gained the respect of family, friends and peers, as well as mine.

I recognized my sister's strong independent drive for what it was during her senior year of high school, and it is here I first witnessed her strength of character. Due to some rebellious years in her youth, she was short a few critical credits to graduate high school. Not wanting to do an extra semester, she went to school during the day and took night classes at the local community college. Then, directly out of high school with a goal to become an executive secretary and no money for college, my sister found the funding to put herself through a business school, and in time, became an executive secretary. I remember wanting to be like her, independent and resourceful.

Never one to let others know how bad things may have been, Julie always displayed a determination to beat the odds. Years later she found herself to be a single mom raising three kids on her own, living on welfare. To provide the best education for her daughters, she taught a combined kindergarten-first grade class in a local church sponsored school. It was there she realized that, "There was a lot I did not know and wanted to know. I wanted to be more effective at what I was doing." To do that she would need to get a degree. As single mom of three "living on welfare, doing odd jobs, and always scraping by," this would be a steep uphill battle.

Enrolling in the nearest community college she still had to raise three children on her own, and scheduling school around her children was not going to be easy. Understanding that at times it would be necessary to take less than a full load of classes, she knew, "It would take me three years to complete community college." Everything seemed to be going well when "about halfway through my third year I was diagnosed with breast cancer." Relying on God, family and friends, the next year was spent undergoing radiation and chemo therapy, while attempting to keep her classes going. When I asked her how this affected her schooling she said, "I went from doing it full time, to taking one or two classes while I had chemo. My two year course took four."

Going through chemo was difficult enough but the results of chemo therapy for her would be devastating. In an effort to kill the cancer in her lymph nodes, chemo left her partially paralyzed in her right arm and her hand was virtually useless. The cancer was gone but so was the use her right hand. Because she was right handed, she could no longer do what she always took for granted; yet that did not bother her as much as the idea of how she would be able write on a chalkboard in her classroom. That is a memory I will never forget: her tenacity, her refusal to quit. She needed a hand to write with and she was going to find a way, she persevered and kept looking forward. When I asked what kept her going, she replied "I wanted my girls to value education, to be a better role model. They were the emphasis behind why I chose this even though it was going to be difficult." Friends and family were astounded at her determination as she taught herself to be left handed and relearned to type. "I never seriously considered quitting. I remember thinking, 'if I quit I might just give up on life', but I wasn't going to let that answer defeat me. I had a lot of faith that God was going to bring me through this. I felt that part of it was to keep looking forward." She did that in spades. She survived the cancer and graduated with a Liberal Arts Associates Degree.

Ready to move on to California Polytechnic State University to finish her BA in Education, Julie found there was one more obstacle that needed to be overcome: Cal Poly was a 60 mile drive. "I applied at Cal Poly,

got accepted, did all the stuff I needed to do, except being able to find someplace to live. I knew with the transportation I had I could not drive from Lompoc to Cal Poly on a regular basis.” It was not just about finding a place to live but to find an affordable one, for she was still on welfare. After doing everything she could think of, she realized at the last minute it was not going to happen. Unwilling to admit defeat, Julie turned to Chapman University a satellite school on Vandenberg Air Force Base. “They offered a four year degree and teaching credentials. It was more expensive but I had lots of grants I was able to use because I was a single mom.” Instead of going with a liberal arts degree, which was her plan, she had to change her major from liberal arts to social and political science. It was through Chapman she completed her BA in Education as well as getting her teaching credentials, then went on to receive her Masters and Administrators degree.

My sister was the first on in our family to complete her college degree, and in the process inspired so many. Her strong independent drive enabled her to complete her degree in the midst of breast cancer, transportation problems, no money and being a single mom. In the process she inspired everyone who knew her story, and her daughters followed in her footsteps. She became the role model she always wanted to be. As I listened to her responses during the interview process, I gained more respect for this sister of mine. I never really understood what it took for her to get her college education. Now twenty years later here I am following in her footsteps, with her voice in my head saying, “Do not give up, it’s going to get tough but that’s part of life. Have confidence in yourself, you can do it and you will never regret it.”

Choices

By Abby Lowe

Nobody can make it through life on their own. Not completely, anyways. In the book, The Other Wes Moore, written by Wes Moore, he explains a true story about two boys with the same name, Wes Moore, the same age, and how they end up with completely different lives. Wes #1 had a family that cared for him and helped him make smart choices that led up to him going to college. However, Wes #2 grows up with a poor support system. He goes out in the streets and sells drugs. He ends up robbing a jewelry store with his brother, Tony, because they were low on money and Tony fatally shot a cop, and Wes #2 is now in jail for the rest of his life with no chance for parole. His brother had the same sentence but died in jail due to kidney failure. Both boys, Wes #1 and Wes #2, made bad decisions at one point, one just had more help getting out of trouble than the other. In The Other Wes Moore, written by Wes Moore, he points out two crucial things that I personally think are very important for turning out well in life: good role models and personal responsibility.

Wes #1 had great role models throughout his life. He had his mom, grandparents, and the men from military school. When Wes was two, his dad passed away. Because his mom couldn't raise her kids by herself, Wes's family moved in with his grandparents. Living in the Bronx now, things had changed, like drug deals, violence, and prostitution. Wes's grandparents made strict rules because of what was going on in the streets. Whenever the streetlights came on, Wes had to get home (Moore 42). They only made that rule because they cared about Wes's safety and didn't want him to get caught up in the wrong stuff or with the wrong people. However, Wes #1 was lazy when it came to school. His grades weren't great. But he could memorize song lyrics like it was nothing. His mom explained, "Well, your grades obviously aren't bad because you can't pick this stuff up or because you're stupid, you are just not working hard enough" (Moore 75-76). Wes didn't care about his grades at all, and his mom wasn't going to let him slip under and possibly drop out when he could. His behavior wasn't good either. He was put on academic and disciplinary probation at school due to bad grades, not attending classes, and setting off smoke bombs, just to name a few. His mom decided to knock some sense into him and send him to military school. He hated it at first. He thought everybody was out to get him. Then he saw differently. Moore states, "They made it clear that they cared if I succeeded, and eventually so did I" (115). His attitude changed and his sentences ended with sir or ma'am. He had more respect for others and himself. He didn't want to get into any more trouble like he had at school:

When we're young, it sometimes seems as if the world doesn't exist outside our city, our block, our house, our room. We make decisions based on what we see in that limited world, and follow the only models available. . .What changed was that I found myself surrounded by people. . .who kept pushing me to see more than what was directly in front of me, to see the boundless possibilities of the wider world and the unexplored possibilities within myself (Moore 179).

The only way to learn from life and to grow in a more positive way is to expand your world and not be all about yourself. Wes had people that helped him see that there was more in front of him than what he was seeing. He needed those people, because if he didn't have them, I think he would have had a different outcome to his life, possibly like Wes #2.

Wes #2 had horrible role models. He had his mom, his dad who wasn't around, his brother, Tony, and his crew members. When Wes #2 was younger, Tony kept telling him to do well in school and not to blow it off like he was starting to. Tony was a drug dealer and was too deep in to stop. Wes #2 comments, "He loved his brother but had learned to ignore his occasional 'do as I say, not as I do' tirades. Tony, by contrast, was desperately trying to give his little brother information he thought he needed, the kind of information that Tony never got, Tony felt his little brother's life could be saved, even if he felt his own had already, at the age of fourteen, passed the point of no return" (Moore 27). Tony saw what it did to himself being in the drug business and how it affected him and others and didn't want to see his brother get dragged into that stuff. Despite what his brother told him, Wes got into things he shouldn't have. He was looking through his mom's closet for change but found a

bag of weed instead. He did too much and had a little bit to drink and went home not feeling well. Wes's mom came into his room and knew exactly what he did. "Well at least now you know how bad it feels and you will stay away from drinking", she laughs (Moore 61-62). His mom didn't really care that he drank or smoked weed that day. She didn't ground him or anything, she just laughed at him. Wes's dad was never around either. He didn't want to be. "Mary looked down at her son and uttered the words she had never said before and never thought she would have to say 'Wes meet your father'" (Moore 25). Mary kept her son away from his father, knowing it would be best for him. Wes #2 had never seen his father until his mom went to take him to see him. Not having a dad around really affects a kid, and a lot of times not in a good way, which in Wes #2's case is true. I'm not sure it would have mattered if his dad was there. Could his life have ended better considering he didn't want to be there he probably would've been a lazy father, or one that didn't care what Wes did. Because Wes #2 didn't have any good role models in his life, Wes eventually got into the streets and began drug operations. He had a crew. There were certain people for certain jobs in the crew. They were all there for each other. Moore comments, "This was the crew. They would work together, fight together, stay together. An unbreakable bond united the crew-for many members, it was the only support system they had. It was family" (111). Despite the crew being a very negative support system for Wes, and everything they all did together, like drug business, they were there for each other no matter what and is family for those who don't have anyone there for them.

I have great role models in my life. My family, friends, and church family are all my support system. They support me in everything I want to do with my life. There are some things I've done that weren't the smartest things to do, and they let me know that they don't agree with what I do. A few months ago, I went to the lake with a coworker, a friend at that time. It wasn't smart because I didn't know he liked me. He became obsessed basically. My mom really helped me with what I needed to say to him and when I should have said it, so it's taken care of now. If my family or friends don't like my decisions, they yell at me and tell me what the consequences could be if something ended badly, they don't want me to get into trouble. Knowing this, I can go to them for anything I want to do or have done and they will help me through it, and with that, I know with their help I can make better decisions.

Wes #1 was starting to make wiser choices. Since he's been put into military school, he gained more respect for others and he increased his responsibility by becoming in charge of people. Moore expressed, "I was now a platoon sergeant, a cadet master sergeant, and the youngest senior noncommissioned officer in the entire corps. Three years ago I'd been one of the insubordinate kids first entering the gates of Valley Forge. In an ironic turn, I was now one of the ones in charge of them" (115). With being in military school for three years, his leaders drilled into him that he needed to realize how he was acting and grow up. And he did. He and a friend from military school decided to go out for pizza one night when a drunk driver drove by and almost ran them over. The driver came back around, yelled the "N" word, a fighting word, and threw a bottle, hitting Wes and chipping his tooth. The two boys decided they didn't want to fight and headed back to campus. Moore noticed, "Years earlier, I had run through these same woods with all of my might, looking for safety, trying to get away from campus. Tonight, I ran through the same woods looking for safety, but in the other direction" (122). When Wes first started military school, he ran away four times and was given a fake map to get home that actually led to these same woods, but now he ran back through these woods to safety. Going back to camp he knew he could make better choices for himself and have his leaders in school help him along the way. Wes decided he wanted more for his life so he eventually went to college. "I had returned to Baltimore two years earlier, after I'd been accepted at Johns Hopkins University to complete my undergraduate degree, which I'd begun in junior college at Valley Forge" (Moore 159). Wes realized he could do more with his life if he made the right choices than if he ignored everybody and disobeyed the men at military school.

Wes #2 made very poor choices in his life. He sold drugs and got too deep into it to quit. "Wes stood on the corner in Dundee Village . . . he would bring drugs into the county" (Moore 112). Wes ran corners with his crew. He was making good money for a while. However, he had four kids. Moore explains, "His two children with Alicia came back-to-back, born in 1992 and 1993, his children with Cheryl came in the same fashion, born in 1995 and 1996" (137). Wes didn't care about sleeping with different girls back then; he thought he was cool to do it. He ended up with four kids because of it. Eventually, he came to his senses and realized he couldn't live the way he was anymore. Moore notes, "He stayed at the Job Corps Center so he could provide a better life for

his kids” (144). He had a few jobs for over a year, but unfortunately, he wasn’t making enough money to support his children and ended back out on the streets and got into more trouble. Tony and Wes, running low on money, robbed a jewelry store. In the process, Tony fatally shot an officer, a dad of five. “The reporter warned those watching that they should be assumed ‘armed and very dangerous’ . . . Mary’s [their mom] large-screened television was now filled with photos of these suspects. Her heart broke when she saw Tony’s and Wes’s faces staring back at her” (Moore 149). They saw no other way to get the money. They ended up being found guilty with a lifetime sentence with no chance of parole. Wes made all the wrong choices he could make. He had a huge opportunity to change his life around at the Job Corps Center, but he decided not to stay with it; instead he ended back out on the streets with his brother and crew members that landed him back in jail, but for the rest of his life.

I have a great support system and role models. Even though I have that, I still don’t always make the right decisions. When I went to the lake, I told my parents that I was going there with my friend from work. We were friends at that time. We were there for a few hours. Turns out my parents were trying to get a hold of me; my phone was dead. They wanted to know specifically where I was. They didn’t know the guy, and honestly I didn’t know him too well either. When I got home, my parents were gone, looking for me. I got yelled at a lot when I got home. I didn’t understand what the big deal was then but I do now, it could have ended badly. I am where I am with the decisions I have made, though. I have a job, I’m continuing my schooling, and I’m healthy. I’ve made good decisions for the major things in my life, but I need to think about what I do more before I act out.

In the book The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore, he shows two major points that are crucial for turning out well in life: Good role models and personal responsibility. Wes #1 had great role models in his life which helped him make better choices for himself. In contrast, Wes #2 was the complete opposite. He had awful role models which didn’t help him make the right choices in his life when they were the most crucial times to make them, and that’s what landed him in jail for the rest of his life. No matter how well you think you might be able to handle yourself alone, you can’t. You need the right people to help you out so you make the right decision in the end.

Down and Out for 180 Days

By Sarah Burton

It was the second week of my sophomore year, and so far in school I was a less than desirable student to my teachers and my parents. My work was lousy, and usually incomplete if even begun, and my attitude was offensive to every teacher I had. I would do anything to cause them frustration. Somehow, this was an acute act of revenge, not that they personally did anything to me or really even deserved it, but in my mind this vendetta needed to be served. My mind was rarely there. It was foggy with a drug-induced haze, or hangover, and swirled with thoughts of how to get out of there. It had begun in 8th grade. Before then I was an excellent and active student. I participated in basketball, cheerleading, dance team, the academic team, and Science Olympiad. But in the 2004 school year, when I moved to a new school, something inside me broke, like a fine-tuned watch that finally gives out and stops ticking. What made the cogs suddenly cease to turn? I wanted, I needed a change. So in this new school setting, I decided to make the most of the new experience. I befriended a girl who had a very random thing in common with me: We LOVED the Beach Boys. We instantly clicked and became close friends. Her mother was a junkie with bottles upon bottles filled with pills upon pills. The trouble began there. But not long after, I did something unspeakable for a town so small. This incident changed my life and many years later and made me learn something about myself.

On this particular Tuesday, I had left my house with two Vicodin 10s, and a small bag of mediocre marijuana for a friend of mine. It was her birthday the previous Saturday and I forgot to get her a present. The bag smelled rotten, like burnt oregano. In those days, what was left in my pipe got put back in the bag, so part of it had already been smoked. I was a clueless stoner, meaning I had not been smoking that long, so my habits were uncivilized in the world of weed. But I hurried my way to 1st hour with these goodies wrapped up tight inside my bra.

Gym class. A class I would fail 3 times during my high school career. This being my first fail to date, my class consisted of students one year younger than me. One of these students was the birthday girl, Renee. She was a shy girl with one hell of a funny bone. She had frizzy blonde hair that was always dyed black, bright blue eyes with a pound of black eyeliner hidden behind wire glasses, black clothes, and black low-top Converse.

The locker room smelled of sweat and disinfectant, as most locker rooms do. The walls were gray, the benches were gray, and the lockers were blue. But considering the rest of the room, the lockers still appeared to be gray, reminding you that this was the most depressing locker room ever inhabited by stinky teenage girls. I got Renee's attention and led her into the shower where I displayed my gift with a self-righteous smile.

“For me!?” Renee asked excitedly.

“You bet! Sorry I missed your birthday”, I replied.

She was happy. And I was happy for bringing happiness to her. Little did I know, another student was watching.

My next class was Algebra I. I sat at my desk with my head laid down as I often did, until I heard over the loud, obnoxious intercom: “Sarah Burton, please come to the office.” The voice was calm, so I had no cause for concern. I popped my head up and made eyes with the teacher. She shot me a look that said, “GO.” Walking down the empty hall I honestly didn't know what to think. Somehow what had just happened the hour before never came to mind.... Until I approached the office.

There was a small window to the principal's room. When I caught a glimpse of what was inside, my heart sank. My legs became numb. I felt cold. It was my mother, crying. I entered the principal's office. His name was David Eastin, a fat, funny man filled with hope and trust. I always liked him. No matter how many times the little devil on my shoulder beat out the angel in a game of tug-of-war, he kept believing in me, giving me chance after chance to knock that dirty devil out of the game.

I took the seat next to my sobbing mother.
Silence.
More silence.
Then finally, Mr. Eastin spoke.
“Sarah. Do you know why your mother is crying?”
“Yes.”
“Why?”
“Because I've ruined my life.” A tear began to fall.

After that, my senses slipped. I stared at the pictures on Mr. Eastin's desk. One of his adopted daughter, Emma, sitting on a park bench in some beautiful city, and the other of his dog, who died earlier that year. I couldn't look at anything else. I heard them talking but couldn't really understand. Their voices were muffled like when someone is whispering through a closed door or a dividing wall. I knew what he was telling me anyway. The way my mother looked at me is still very overwhelming. To see the disdain, and shock, and chaos, and sorrow in her eyes all at once was brutal. But that still wasn't the worst of it.

When I was brought home, where I was cursed to spend 180 days out of school, my father was sitting at the kitchen table, waiting. The big wooden table where we shared every meal together did not seem big enough today. I sat as far away from him as I could, hoping it would somehow make the rant more bearable.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” he said without much emotion. His face was dead, like his mind gave up, but his body kept going.

I said nothing. I couldn't speak. I couldn't find the air. My chest felt like it was being pushed into my spine. The weight and pressure was too much. He asked me again, this time with hatred in his voice.

“Goddammit, Sarah. What the fuck is wrong with you?!”

This went on for about 25 minutes. The only words I uttered were, “I'm sorry”. I didn't know what to say. In my mind, I tried to say other things but my mouth wouldn't move. My mouth, tongue, and brain gave up. After the rant, my father did not speak to me for 11 days. Living under the same roof as someone who refuses to talk to you or even look at you is hard on the mind. For the last few days of this shunning, I tried to say something interesting or funny to try and get a rise out of him, but nothing. We loved to quote movies. He could quote any line from any movie and nail it dead on. I attempted this coy technique and still got nothing.

Even that night, my parents still made me eat dinner at that big wooden table that seemed so small only hours before. Neither of them looked at me or talked to me during this dinner. It was the most awkward dinner of my life. But life went on. I still didn't learn my lesson, much to my parents' dismay. I still partied, still took drugs, and still failed miserably in school. But, strangely enough, that was not the lesson that I learned from this ordeal. The lesson was simple.

The other student that was watching will not be mentioned. For years I blamed this girl for ruining my life. I blamed her for all the troubles I faced in school later on when I couldn't graduate because of that 180 days. I blamed her for not being able to get my license until I turned 18. I blamed her for not being able to find a part-time job in school. I blamed everything on this girl, until I grew up. I had to take responsibility for my own actions. Lesson learned. The hard way.

Encouragement vs. Discouragement

By Sarah Burton

At a young age, when difficult times seem to have a larger effect on us, authority figures play a vital role in our positive or negative mindset. I include both, because no matter who you are, where you come from, or how old you are, you will always have both positive and negative forces in your life. I believe strongly in this topic. I am currently pursuing a career as a high school teacher, so the subject of authority figures providing confidence and motivation to students is very hard-hitting. There are many prime examples of this in the book *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* by Wes Moore. The book tells a story of two men of the same name, in the same city, who, at a fork in the road, take opposite paths. The book begins when they are young, when both boys have forces for and against them, but in the end the strongest impact prevails. This enticing book also signifies the importance of positive and negative impacts enforced by authority figures or family members at any stage in life that can influence a person's thoughts and actions.

The author Wes' first influence was his mother. His father died when Wes was young, but his mother remained as strong as she could. Their family was eventually forced to move in with Wes' grandparents. As Wes states in the third chapter, "But no matter how much the world crumbled, my mother was determined to see us through it" (47). She was not going to allow the situation to hurt their future. The action that his mother took was a courageous influence that can greatly nourish a child's understanding of sacrifices that must be made in such a dire position. Meanwhile, the other Wes had been without a father since he was born. He had met him in a very awkward moment as a small child, but still did not really know him. His older brother, Tony, was the only male figure in his life he had to idolize, but he was wrapped up in the drug business. His mother worked constantly, so she did not have a lot of time to keep tabs on her children, and this caused her children to slip through the cracks and fall under the spell of fast money. The book states that "She knew what her older son was into but didn't think there was anything she could do for him now" (71). This is a perfect example of letting go the will to impact a favorable change that is desperately needed. Sadly, her younger son fell to the same wayward path due to her lack of involvement.

As for the author Wes, he was falling very far behind in high school. The teachers suspected he may have learning disability, but his mother knew differently. She did not simply agree to the assumption that because her son was failing he had a learning disability. She knew that he could do better and when she discovered that he had not been attending school, she rallied the family to raise money to send him to military school. Wes, of course, was extremely distraught and hurt by being sent away to what he felt was like a prison. However, Wes found a very influential and guiding mentor in Colonel Batt. A dominating adviser must have the passion and trust to help improve his pupil's outlook. Wes gives us evidence of Batt's understanding stating, "Colonel Batt looked at my eyes—which were downcast and barely open—and realized if he didn't bend the rules just slightly, he would lose me for good" (94). I love this part in the book, because it is so true to how an instructor can assist young people in a very positive way and have an enormous impact on their enthusiasm and happiness. Knowing that someone believes in you enough to make exceptions or be so understanding is one of the key elements in helping to improve someone's perception of the situation.

Later in the book, the other Wes was getting into more and more trouble as he got older. By 1996, he had already been to jail more than once, had four children with two different girls, and was still in the business of selling drugs. The book explains that "[Wes was] tired of being locked up, tired of watching drugs destroy entire families, entire communities, an entire city" (138). He wanted to change his life. His friend, Levy, was about to begin a program called Job Corps. Wes had his doubts, though. His concerns about the program were partially fueled by his aunt Virginia. She had "started Job Corps but didn't finish. She said it was too much like jail" (139). The opinions of our influences in our lives can really affect our outlook on any situation. The Job Corps situation was an extremely beneficial opportunity for Wes. He did go, but I believe that his initial assumption of the program dampened his positive acceleration. He eventually returned to the harsh criminal life that made him the money he needed.

As a student who had a lot of trouble with motivation in school, I can understand how difficult it can be to make the right decision, especially when there is seemingly no one there to guide you. Sometimes the words of others can have no effect on our mentality whatsoever, but too often, they do. The encouragement or discouragement of anyone in your life can cause tremendous changes in your attitude and behavior. The author Wes' strongest push came later in life, as did mine. Not to suggest that our mothers did not inspire us to do the right thing, it was just simply harder to listen. The reason I chose to be a high school teacher is to help students that are in a similar situation as the Weses. The ability to encourage troubled students is a very difficult task to master. I knew a high school history teacher who did this for me named Mr. Long, and I expect to do the same. As I mentioned before, I truly believe that people or even one single person could be a saving grace to someone and make a huge impact on the choices they make and the emotions that fuel them.

The Episodes of Life

By Susan Kirsch

Today books are easy to come by and relatively inexpensive, at least children's books are. Yet not all families value books or have the means to buy them. Eudora Welty, author of "One Writer's Beginning", tells us that "any room, in any part of the house, at any time of the day should be for reading" (298). Welty was one of the fortunate ones, for her love of reading came from parents who sacrificed to purchase books and read to her whenever there was time. This is a great idea, and one I tried to implement as an adult with my children, but it was not always so. My history of education has been a journey with many twists and turns, from beginning until now, as is everyone's. But life is not just about reading; it's also about those episodes that help to shape us. It's about who we have become and the decisions we make to stay that way or to change. Gail Godwin, author of "The Watcher at the Gates", tells us about her inner critic, one that zaps her of inspiration, whom she calls her "Watcher". Once she realized that she was not the only one with this issue, she began a journey to understand herself. There were many significant episodes in my life that make me who I am today; exploring those has helped me to understand myself. To learn to love to read in a house with few books, to be your own worst critic who keeps you from believing in yourself, and to have the determination to change what you can is not just my story, but one that resonates with everyone.

There were few books in my home growing up, not because my parents did not care, but more due to circumstances. We moved a lot during my early and educational years, and when one continually moves books are not something you take with you. You have to understand the times to get the full picture of life in my youth, just as we have to understand that when Welty was young only the rich had extensive libraries in their homes. Welty tells us, "Neither of my parents came from homes that could afford to buy many books" (Welty 299). It was obvious her grandparent's love of books had been passed down to her parents, who then instilled that same love of books in her. In my family reading was not a priority. My father was in the military which made money tight and we had few books in the home. Days were for chores or playing outside and only in winter did we sit to read; and if we had a book it was usually a school book. My father's love was for science and history, so in our home we had encyclopedias. They are the only books I remember as being important when I was very young. I remember pulling them off the shelf in the living room on a dark winter night, then sprawling on the floor with my brothers being inspired by all those adventures from history. This is how I developed a love of history or story, for that is what history is: a story of time past.

The winter of my seventh year in school was an awakening for me. It was the year I discovered books could take me on adventures far different from encyclopedias. I was finally old enough to stay overnight at a friend's house and was invited to spend the weekend. As I entered her room, I felt as if I was transported into a magical kingdom full of dolls, colors, soft quilts, and pillows; then unexpectedly her closet door opened to reveal a vast treasury of books. It was more books than I had ever seen in anyone's home before that day. Awestruck, her closet shelves revealed every Nancy Drew mystery ever written and I could not wait to open one. This discovery caused me to trudge through a field of snow up to my knees just to borrow the next one in the series. That year was remarkable because I discovered books could take me around the world or into outer space with dangerous and exciting adventures awaiting me. This revelation caused me to spend my spare time at the school library first trying to finish the Nancy Drew series, then looking for more adventures to be found within the pages of the next book. From an early age Welty was surrounded with books, whereas I had to look hard and long to find a book and then to bring it home.

My foray into writing was met more with internal struggles, rather than with the physical obstacles of reading, and out of it grew a deep set belief that I was not creative. My insecurities may have started from living with three very loud and strong willed siblings, always overriding my creative ideas for one of their own, and then growing as I was presented with different moments in life. I truly believe "Learning stamps you with its moments" (Welty 302). These are periods of your life that you look back upon to see what formed you. Being required to write poetry in high school as a sophomore was one such moment. I remember it as a frightfully, painful experience in which I froze. My mind was blank. The only poem I could remember was "Roses are Red"

or some version that children use to taunt each other. This episode in my life reinforced my belief that I had no imagination to write a poem, a short story or anything else. Desperate to escape English composition in my junior year, as an alternative I chose what was even more frightening: Drama.

All of this created a lasting belief that writing was not for me, which I carried into adulthood as I continued to avoid English in college. An action which not only hurt my grades, but further reinforced my lack of faith in my ability to write. Gail Godwin wrote an allegory about her restraining critic, her “Watcher”, the voice standing over you whispering in your ear it can’t be done, it’s not good enough. She says, “I was not the only writer who had a restraining critic...who sapped the juice from my green” (Godwin 290). She explains how she compared her watcher with other authors; how his voice comes with many disguises to keep you from finishing or even starting your task. I am my own worst enemy when starting a writing project. With every writing task I start, my first thought is I have nothing to say, how does this relate to me? From there on it is downhill into ruminative thinking. That voice saying “it’s not good enough, you will fail” has kept me from enrolling in creative writing classes because I was too afraid to write. My watcher had kept me for far too long frozen and incapacitated; I wanted to change but did not think I could.

It was my journey into home education that made the change for me, the need to learn all over again, and the determination to do a good job for my girls. As I rekindled my love for reading while searching for literature, such as “Ivanhoe” by Sir Walter Scott, to use as schooling material, I found I needed to re-examine my writing skills in order to teach writing; all the while looking for that illusive escape route. Godwin says, “It’s amazing the lengths a Watcher will go to keep you from pursuing the flow of your imagination” (291); from telling you it is too hard, or you will never be good at it, to everything in between. It wasn’t until I needed to prepare my daughter to take the essay portion of the ACT that I was forced to learn to write. I spent hours searching the internet for websites like Purdue’s Online Writing Lab in order to teach myself, with that voice hammering in my head, “You can teach her to write, but you cannot correct her papers for you are no good at writing”. To uncover the demon that interferes with my ability to create, I made the choice to come back to college and major in English. Still my watcher will not let me just create. He makes me go over my sentences until they are perfect, only then am I allowed to go on to the next paragraph. I have to tell myself, “Yes, I can do this; the housework can wait until I’m done.” It’s a slow process learning to let go and forge ahead.

The discovery of adventures in reading gave me a love for books that caused me to trudge across a field of snow. Which in turn helped me to create for my youngest daughter the kind of home Welty grew up in: where “any room, in any part of the house, at any time of the day should be for reading” (Welty 298). This lifestyle I created through home schooling where reading would be for all times of the day lead me to face my fears. As I gained a love for reading the great authors - such as Chaucer, Tolkien, and Sir Walter Scott - and helped my daughter conquer her fears of writing, I learned to conquer mine. With the home school years behind I felt a void, a longing to read and to learn more. This void led me to enroll in college again, only this time to study English and Literature as I learn to write. I understand now there is a watcher sitting on my shoulder whose sole purpose is to “stop the flow of my imagination” (Godwin 291). I will take it one step at a time, one class at a time, looking forward to my journey in this new episode in my life.

Genetic Time Machine

By Patrick Flint

I enjoy pondering the existence of the universe, maybe too often, but who does not wonder why everything we know exists? Asking questions toward the beginning of all things is fun, but the answers are always silent. A better place to start asking, would be to understand where I have come from personally. There are lifetimes of memories that have taken place between my grandparents' birth, and my time. The difference contains my entire family tree and the limbs of a few others. Plus, all of the events history has recorded from their perspective. Our elders are walking encyclopedias of information that can easily be passed by, unless someone would stop, and open them up. So, I have taken my strand of time with my hand and glided as far back as possible; to inquire of my grandparents the many differences and similarities between our times, in terms of learning and technology, and to see what they predict to occur in our futures.

I sat down with my grandparents, Kenneth and Glen Rose, along with grandpa's regular, sci-fi movie channel, and one of their other grandchildren, Mia. We chatted about how their neighborhood was slowly changing shape for a while, until I asked them, "What are the major differences between my time and when you were young?" Glen Rose automatically pointed to my laptop sitting in the center of the room between us. Grandpa began to explain the differences of the world with technology, "Everybody has computers and cell phones now," "I don't!" Mia quickly spouted out. My grandpa returned, "Well neither do I. Back when we were in school we did not have any computers or cell phones. If you wanted to know anything you had to find a book and look it up. I would come walking home with a trombone in one hand and about 3 or 4 books in the other." He stopped to chuckle a bit and then said, "Yeah, we did not have any backpacks. I don't know what was going on there." He pointed my attention to the bookcase behind me which held decades worth of encyclopedias. My grandpa used to buy them yearly so my father and his siblings could use them for school papers, which he still finds embedded between the pages when he scans through them from time to time. Technology has changed the way people learn in profound ways. Most people can whip out a cell phone to look up a definition, or research a fact. Literally, we hold the information of the universe as we know it in our hands. Since the start of recorded history, knowledge has been at our fingertips, but until recently, people could not slide it into their pockets.

As we continued to chat, I learned more about what our town used to be, and began to paint a mental picture in my mind of how people interacted. My grandpa mentioned that the first car his dad bought was a '49 Plymouth. Before then his family walked everywhere. In fact, the way that most people got around was on foot. My grandma, commenting on her trek to school everyday, said, "We had to walk up over the top of King Hill, across to the other hill, and down the other side to get to the school. Heck, in the winter, sometimes it would be so slick I could hardly even climb the dang thing." The hills in the south end of Saint Joseph are very steep, even driving on them puts the feat into perspective. Adding snow would probably make the original mile feel more like 5. Imagining my little grandma as a child conquering those hills made me laugh a little bit. "But, if you wanted to go to school bad enough, you did it," she added after my lack of seriousness. It seems that school was considered more of a privilege than a requirement. People valued hard work more in my grandparents' time than today because that was all people had to do. Education meant a lot to families, but overall, people did not consider it a large part of their future. College was expensive then too and there was no federal aid or funding for schools. Life was lived day to day. Members of the community had to work together to create job opportunities for others to provide for their family.

Life was very simple when my grandparents were young. I asked them, "What would you do for hobbies?" Grandma responded quickly, "Whittle." I was surprised a little, but she assured me she was not joking. "Yeah, my brother got a bee bee gun and I didn't, but I wanted one, so I took off the bottom of an orange crate, hollowed it out, and made a foil handle for it. My mom had some sandals so I took them for some leather and made me a couple holsters. Man, I was walking around like Deputy Dog." My grandpa added that he would take off, "life," magazine covers and grab a piece of paper, and try to make a copy of the person's face on the cover. When he became good at it his dad bought him a wood burner to make engravings. Toward the end of our conversation I asked what they thought might happen in the world by the time I was their age. Their response

was alarming, it did not take a second for them to say, “Well, if the world is still here.” I guess, since life has changed so much in the time they have lived, predicting an outcome for my future is too uncertain and far away to fathom. I want to believe humanity can hang on to the things we should hold dear like, being progressive, and doing good for one another. Hopefully it is only scare tactics from the media that gives people a sense that it is inevitable for the world as we know it to eventually dismantle.

After stepping out of my genetic time machine, I have begun to realize how easily life changes. Everything in the time I am growing up within is drastically different than in the era of my grandparents. In order to obtain a successful living now, education is a requirement. For my grandparents it was exemplary to be educated, but not a necessity. Success was measured more by a person’s character and not so much by their pocketbook or title. I feel that some people in the world have grown so accustomed to convenience that the potential of the technological advances our society has made can be overlooked. Although, I do not feel the world community is headed for a path of despair. I believe that through education and technology the world can be brought together. Then, humanity will realize how well we can all experience life.

Growing Up with Reading

By Mon'tra Qualls-Woods

Growing up in a rough neighborhood, reading was a way for me to escape the harsh realities that the neighborhood presented on a daily basis. Frederick Douglass in "How I Learned to Read and Write," explains how he had to overcome obstacles such as slavery in order to receive an education. In Richard Rodriguez, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books", he describes how he knew both his parents could read but he's never really seen them read anything but bills, recipes, or newspapers. These two essays showed me that no matter what challenges you face when you learn how to read you can achieve great things and become successful. My personal reading life is similar to those of Frederick Douglass but contrasts from that of Richard Rodriguez. Although my challenges weren't nearly as severe as slavery or having to move to a different part of the country just to read. I have faced challenges of being placed in lower level reading courses, being told that I was too dumb to read or being told that since I am an African American male that I'll be illiterate and would never make it far in reading but this also had a good side because I had a parent who read for pleasure and that showed me as a child reading was imperative.

I was surrounded with reading as a child. My mother loved reading from: novels, short stories, newspaper articles, poems, or even lyrics of songs. My mother always read. Sometimes she would even read to my brothers and me before we would go to bed. She would say, "Guys, it time for bed." We would run to the room and see which book we wanted Mom to read to us that night. We loved when she read books such as "No David", by David Shannon and of course we loved all books by Dr. Seuss. Mom took her time reading, and she was gentle with reading, she cared for reading so much that she would read because she was bored, or even sometimes at stop lights she would read something out of a book or magazine. In Richard Rodriguez's, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books" states, "For both of my parents, however, reading was something done out of the necessity and as quickly as possible" (293). Rodriguez is saying that reading was something done only when needed. Reading was never a necessity; reading was never appreciated, nor was reading ever mandatory in his childhood home. My childhood completely differed from the childhood of Richard Rodriguez. At home, reading was a must. Every single night we had to read something, either a book, lyrics to a song, or a letter, we had to read. I even remember my mom making up stories at bed time. One story in particular, was about the sailor who had a million pieces of candy and would feed the candy to the hungry ocean monster as he sailed around looking for the lost treasure of Qualls Island. Another story was the about the bad drug dealer who got caught by the cops and was sentenced to life in prison. I really think she only made up this store just to assure us that all bad people do get caught and sent jail. Mom had a collection of books, mysteries in particular. She loved reading about crime, murders, and ways to get inside the minds of criminals.

Although reading was introduced to me at an early age, I still faced struggles in an effort to learn how to read and to learn how to read well. In Frederick Douglass, "How I Learned to Read and Write," he explains that his master, Mr. Auld, stated, "If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master and to do as he is told to do" (270). Mr. Auld was basically saying that, if any black man knew how to read, they would become a threat to the institution of slavery and would take over or take more than what was given to him. Mr. Auld also explained that, "Slaves would be no use to their masters, if they knew how to read" (Douglass 270). This horrific quote reminds me of a time when I was in third grade, a teacher named Ms. Wilkerson told me that it is a proven fact that African American males are less likely to be able to read because we were "lesser-developed" humans. She would allow everyone in the class to read except those who were black.

One day, she decided to call on me to read and as I began to read, she said, "Oh, you read quite well for a black boy." To this very day, I would never know what possessed her to even say such a disrespectful thing like that. She even put me in a lower reading class because she thought I needed "special" help. Keep in mind only blacks were in this "special help" tutoring. At this point in my reading life, I was already one grade level behind and to be purposely ridiculed by an adult was very hard for me. Thinking that I wasn't smart enough or believing

the rumor that since I was black, I wouldn't be able to read really started to take a toll on me. This lasted until about my fifth grade year of elementary. It all changed when I picked up, "Tapped between the Lash and the Gun," by Arvella Whitmore. This book was one the best books I had the privilege of reading. It was about a young African American male who grew up in a rough neighborhood. He faced struggles of drugs, rape, gangs, poverty, and the ability to read. Somehow he went through a space in time and it pushed him from the present day to the nineteenth-century. Here, he met his ancestors who taught him how it was hard for them to learn how to read and how he was taking his freedom for granted. He was not appreciating the fact that millions of African Americans died for him to have the right to read a book. This book made me think of Frederick Douglass in "How I Learned to Read and Write," when he explains how it was un-normal for slaves to know how to read and that masters would prohibit their slaves from reading books and becoming educated in fear of an uprising.

Middle School was my peak in reading. During this time I enjoyed reading, and I wanted to learn more about the world and I knew I had to read to do this. At this stage in my reading life, I was more like Frederick Douglass, as he states in, "How I Learned to Read and Write," "...I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read" (271). If someone told me I couldn't read, I strive to prove them wrong. I especially enjoyed reading about world history; particularly Ancient Egypt and Ancient Rome. I would read sometimes two or three books every week just to gain knowledge of the world. I believe I developed this trait from my mom since she loved to read. Reading became more enjoyable to me during this period of my life. This continued up to my freshman year in high school. For some reason, I started to dislike reading. I wasn't reading as much, I wouldn't read aloud in class anymore, and I wouldn't even read magazines or newspapers; I reverted more to reading tweets on Twitter or quotes from Instagram. Since I've been in college reading has made me go back to my Frederick Douglass mind set. I'm getting back into the habit of reading. Reading every single day, and enhancing my vocabulary and strengthening my mind skills.

Reading isn't only the key to success; it's the key to life. Not only has reading strengthened my vocabulary it has allowed me to become more diverse in the way I converse with other people. Although I have faced those struggles of being placed in lower level reading courses, being told that I was too dumb to read or being told that since I am an African American male that I'll be illiterate and would never make it far in reading. I am appreciative for having a mom that enjoyed reading, and who instilled in me the attitude Frederick Douglass had in "How I Learned to Read and Write". I'm also thankful that she didn't possess the attitude of Richard Rodriguez parents in "The Lonely, Good Company of Books". Reading is truly the "...pathway from slavery to freedom..." (Douglass 270).

How My Mother Has Influenced My Life

By Viola Toma

As years pass and decades have gone by, people have the tendency to change not only in appearance but in attitude. You would never guess, just by looking at previous photos compared to photo's now, that my mother is even my mother. If you looked at my mother Grace now, you would never be able to tell how old she is. Because of her illness my mom has aged tremendously, but in the past she used to be more vibrant and outgoing. My mother was and still is a pillar that holds my family up and continues to be an important part of our community. Grace wasn't your typical person, in the sense that she would have complete strangers come up to her and tell her that she was blessed. My mother is a Godly woman and has tried to keep me close to God my entire life span. She is outgoing and encouraging. My mother is my motivation in life, the one person who has the greatest impact on my life and could influence it one way or another.

Unlike popular belief that African's are baldheaded my mother's hair was long and curly. Her physique was once slim and athletic, seemingly like the typical African, but she held herself to a higher standard. My mother is appreciative woman, she takes pride in everything she accomplishes and what her family does. Grace rarely slouched and always walked with a straight back as though she was the princess of South Sudan. She had long muscular legs that could run for hours, but still looked like they could walk the runways in New York. Her arms were soft to the touch, which is something I'm grateful for because (1) heredity of course and (2) hairy arms disgust me. They were the arms that would hold you, caress your face, and wipe the tears that cascaded down your cheeks. They were also the arms that could knock the black out of your skin and sense back into your head if you acted up. I've admired my mother's voice since I was a child because I could never get her accent right. She had a thick African accent, yet it was velvety and comforted me when I needed some advice. Although she just believes that she's doing her job to raise my sisters and I, my mother is more than just a mother to me.

My mother loved to talk yet she was soft spoken, but when she spoke it was as though God himself sent you a personal angel. She always knew what to say to you and could always make your day better. When I was young and became discouraged, as I often did because I feared the world around me, I'd hear her sweet voice speak to me. Her voice was richer than a viola, and sometimes when she spoke it would give me shivers. She'd whisper to me "I promise you, sweetheart, take my hand and everytin' will be fine. God has a plan for eh-very-one." She was in the church choir and I loved to sit in the front, clap along, and watch her sing the gospel songs that would bring atheists, gang members, ex-convicts and everyone in between to salvation. She was the woman who brought my father to the arms of our lord Jesus. Sadly that sweet voice of hers would adapt a slight sharpness when I'd get in trouble. Her once velvety smooth voice would turn shrill and sharp like an untuned violin "Tina. Gal, have you lost ya min'? Com' heya!" I never minded the lectures my mother gave me and would even agitate her sometime just to hear her call out my nickname, because even as she was yelling she'd have a smile on her face. My mother's smile so bright that it would illuminate the darkest caves and warm even the coldest of hearts. I've personally seen it work a multitude of times on my father. Her eyes were dark brown, yet so deep that if you looked into them, even for a split second, you could see the light flicker in them as though they were shooting stars in the sky.

My mother's smile hasn't changed all that much, but her youthful appearance was robbed by the news we got when we heard she had a brain tumor. Although I only saw my mother around nine times within the 4-5 years that she was at the Mayo Clinic, I could report back to my father about the changes. My father was stationed in Iraq at the time, and it was hard to be able to contact him also. Her voice that was once cheerful sounded depressed. Her long black kinky hair that was always kept in a neat afro had been cut. Not only cut but the black afro that I had come to know had shriveled into gray streaks, it had been stripped of its youthfulness and withered down by stress. The stress of a dispersed family, the stress of a husband at war, the stress of not being able to raise her own children. That same stress began to attack her flawless and smooth skin and lips. Her lips have lost their plumpness, her cheeks are no longer full and firm, and the round face that once looked to be carved out of marble has now been replaced by wrinkles, crow's feet, and age spots. Yet throughout this experience my mother kept her faith strong.

I remember as a child that she would always wake us up early Sunday morning to go to church. I never understood why she loved going to church so much at that age, but it's just something she was fond of attending. She would sing in the church choir and would sometimes read bible scriptures in front of the congregation and I felt proud to tell all the other children that Grace was my mother. My mother raised me to be a good Christian and would constantly remind me that even though I may stumble and fall every now and then off the path that I was meant to walk, that I could still redeem myself and that there was always repentance and forgiveness. I believe that this is the reason why she is with us today. Multiple times while in the hospital my mother could have die, but she would plead with God to keep her alive for our sake. My mother never strayed from God and never asked "Why me?" Because she still believed that God would come through to her. With all the changes that happened to her physically, socially, and mentally my mother never wavered when it came to her faith.

In addition, she always supported me in all the extracurricular activities I did whether she was well and unhealthy. While she was at the Mayo Clinic, my mother would ask me about what activities I would partake in and I would have a list and how I felt about it. Though she was miles and hours apart from me I could feel her supporting me in spirit. Grace always told me to get involved not only because it would distract me from the pain I kept inside all throughout the day but because it help me meet new people, gain a support group and open up a bit more. She wanted me not to be angry at the world, but to instead embrace it and learn from my experiences.

My fondest memory of my parents is the earliest I can recall of being a child. It was a rainy Thursday afternoon and my mother had suited my father and I up for a stroll through the neighborhood. I can remember trying to squeak my rubber boots inside the household and my mother saying "Atina, malek ala? Can eta dare amulu da, ruwa bara" which translates over to "Atina, what's wrong with you? If you want to do that then go outside." I knew that that was the signal for me to go nuts so I ran out the door and into the streets. I'd look around and would try to find the largest puddles to leap into. I kicked my boots around and giggles at the noise they made. My mother called out to me out of fear and concerned that I'd fall or a car would hit me because of my trifling size, but my father hushed her and stated to her that I was much too amused to care about with the world. I twisted back around and treaded back to the sidewalk and gestured for them to come. My mother dashed to me, picked me up, embraced me tightly, and proceeded to give me kisses. She placed me down and we observed as my papa struggled with the keys. After securing the door my father joined us and we began to walk. I always fell behind, always attempting to make a bigger splash in every puddle I crosses, no matter the size. Then I'd hear my parents beacon to me together to catch up. I remember running as fast as I could to catch up. Having my arms stretched out towards them and theirs reaching back for mine. Once all of our hands had connected, my parents would swing me like a doll between the two of them. I enjoyed the motion, I enjoyed the warmth of having both of my parents and to have my tiny fingers intermingled with theirs. I enjoyed looking up at their faces and shrieking in delight "Again! Again!"

Though I've grown and matured over the years into the person I am today, I have my mother to thank for getting me to this spot. Even now, while I'm off to college my mother still has an influence on what I do. She'll call me to make sure that I'm doing what I need to be doing and just to check up on me. And though I've done some terrible things to my mother and I've said some horrid things, she still turns the other cheeks and forgives me. My mother has never held a grudge and it still to the day amazes me how deeply rooted in the faith she is. My mother is truly a person with undying faith, she always reminds me that she believes in me and the things I will accomplish.

How We Can Gain Literacy

By Viola Toma

Literacy is essentially the capability of learning how to read and write, yet levels may vary from age groups, time period, and due to how much education someone has obtained. As children we take in our surroundings unknowingly and absorb information from our environment and those around us. As a child I spoke fluent Arabic and could read and write a few of the words. When I came to the United States I was put into an English Learning Language (ELL) class. A developmental class for foreign and immigrant children that taught us how to communicate, read and write in English. It was challenging at first, but after a year or so had passed I got the gist of the lessons and began to read and write a level above my grade. Much like Kathryn Baxter, a woman I interviewed to see how much literacy has changed over the years, I too began to read for pleasure after having my mother read to me. That gesture of having someone to read with, regardless of how small it might have seemed at the moment inspired me to read on my own and to keep reading. As Russell Baker revealed to his readers in “The Art of Eating Spaghetti” how he procrastinated on a writing assignment then found himself writing an insightful piece that brought back memories which made him realize that he was not writing for his teacher, nor his peers, but for himself, I too began to write for myself in ELL. I was tasked with writing in a daily journal. It was tedious in the beginning, yet when I began to write about myself and what made me happy, which was my family, it became enjoyable and one of my favorite pass times instead of a job that I had to do. In the excerpt of Frederick Douglass’ “How I Learned to Read and Write”, Douglass explains to his audience how his masters mistress ceased to teach him the alphabet so he would befriend the young white boys in his neighborhood and would trade bread that he stole from the kitchen for knowledge. Then later while working at a shipyard the idea of writing came to him when he learned what the initials that would be carved in to the boards meant. Despite the fact that I didn’t have to work as hard as Douglass in order to become enlightened I still had to deal with similar hindrances, in addition though Kathryn, Baker, Douglass and I learned how to become educated, we all had various methods of learning and different motives for becoming or not becoming literate.

Although Kathryn was raised in the country whereas I was raised in the suburbs, we both gain a bit of our literacy from being read to as children. By being read to us as children it inspired us to begin reading on our own. If my mother had never read to me when I first came to America I wouldn’t have been fascinated by the way the words used to dance on the page and the pictures that tantalized my mind. Though Kathryn was introverted and timid as a child she found comfort in books. I found that while growing up both Kathryn and I had a common interest, reading mystery books to keep our mind entertained. Because she had to ride the bus home every day as a means of transportation she was not able to be involved in any extracurricular activities while in her youth, but every once and a while she would check out books from her school’s library to read at home to keep herself entertained. Considering she lived in a farm and was not near a city she had a limited variety and or access to books than I did. While continuing the conversation with Kathryn, I learned that she did not attend. Kathryn did not have the motivation to attend school and chose not to pursue college or further education. With this being said, her main reasons were because she didn’t have enough money and because she got married right after high school, but that didn’t stop her. She kept reading to broaden her horizon. During the interview, Kathryn, she thought that literacy in teens was depleting because of how technology was affecting and distracting us. She thought that it was shortening our attention spans and made us less tolerable to learning or comprehending grammar and old texts & literature.

In a sense Douglass stole literacy from the white community where as I was helped by the white folk to become educated. While the world became his classroom I was placed in an actual classroom to learn. In the beginning of his excerpt Douglass tells us how his master’s wife, Mrs. Auld taught him the English writing system in their home, but because her husband explained to her his belief that education could not coincide with slavery, she became influenced by slavery and went from being a thoughtful and considerate woman to a disheartened person. “Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamb-like disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierce-ness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practice her husband's precepts”. (Douglass 272) The woman who taught me my alphabets was my teacher at Jane Addams Elementary School, Mrs. Applebee. She was kind hearted and not once did she

discriminate against me because of my race or color. Although Mrs. Auld stopped teaching Douglass altogether and began to have violent tendencies, what his master had said to her in secrecy had become his motivation for becoming literate. Douglass wanted to prove to his master that a slave could in fact become literate. Mrs. Applebee became my motivation to do well in class because of her kindness towards me and because of her dedication to helping me become literate. Every day she would set aside extra time to help me learn how to read or write if I was falling behind. Though his master's wife was no longer teaching him, Douglass claims that he became friends with the local white children that lived near him and would give them bread in order to gain the skill of reading. "The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read". (Douglass 272) Although I never had to go to that extreme, I would sometimes walk around recess asking my fellow ELL comrades if they could help me study certain words so that I could memorize them.

Whereas Douglass had to use trickery to teach himself how to become well-educated, I had assistance from friends, family, and a teacher. While still a child, I met many children who spoke English fluently. They became my friends and were willing to help me learn the complicated art of English. There were several of them who would play with me at recess and teaching me new words and how to spell them. While occupied at Durgin and Bailey's shipyard, Douglass concocted an idea of learning how he would learn to write. By noticing how the carpenters would carve the initial of what the board would be used for on the pieces of wood Douglass quickly learned how to spell four letter words. Eventually Douglass began to make friends around him that he knew could spell and made a game out of it, then he would challenge them to a spell off. "After that, when I met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it." I would then make the letters which I had been as fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way". (Douglass 275) Later on Douglass narrates how he would use a piece of chalk that he carried around with him as his brush and any surface he could write on as his canvas to practice writing the words he knew. As Time passed, Thomas, Mr. Auld's son, began to attend school and while his mother was out Douglass would write in Thomas' copy books. As a child I remember having a copy book where I would practice writing my name, letters, names of fruits, and animals. I still keep the books in a box in the garage as a reminder of what I overcame.

In Baker's excerpt "The Art of Eating Spaghetti", Baker writes about a time where he loathed read and writing, then while doing an assignment he became inspired to write about a beloved memory which led to him coming to the realization that he was write for himself not others, much like Baker I had the same experience with my ELL journal assignment. While growing up I noticed that a large majority of my community was made up of white folk. These pale common people seemed to be writing letters every day. I knew this because many of the uncolored children in the neighborhood would complain on the playground about having to write letters to their relatives that lived in different states in order to keep in touch. Though I was enlightened at a young age by having my mother reading to me and helping me to become literate which led to me taking an interest in writing, it wasn't until Baker's junior year in high school that becoming a writer would serious consideration for him. Baker then goes on to describe his English teacher, Mr. Fleagle, as being rigid, obsolete, and dim. Though Mrs. Applebee was already a beacon of light to me, her light seemed to shine even brighter compared to Mr. Fleagle. And although Mr. Fleagle was passionate about "Macbeth" and wanted his class to love it just as much as he did, he lacked the skills need to get them involved and engaged in the story. "We read *Macbeth*, Mr. Fleagle loved *Macbeth* and wanted us to love it too, but he lacked the gift of infecting other with his passion." (Baker 267) He then goes on to say "The idea of Mr. Fleagle plucking his nipple from boneless gums was too much for the class. We burst into gasps of irrepressible snickering. Mr. Fleagle stopped." (Baker 268) I've had and have met many teachers in the past that had a fire burning in their hearts about a certain subject, book, poem, piece of literature/theater, or time in history, but because they couldn't deliver their message across correctly they failed to ignite or even spark a small flame of interest within their students.

As Baker goes on to reveal his moment of enlightenment, he tells his readers about how tedious it was to find a subject to write about; while doing my journal assignments for ELL I experienced the same road block and

would write about my daily rituals that I participated in such as art or recess. After a while of procrastinating had gone by Baker finally decided to do the project given to him. While scanning the list of topics his eyes detected *The Art of Eating Spaghetti* and Baker was instantly filled with memories of loved ones all seated around the supper table, sharing laughs and humorous arguments about which method of eating spaghetti was the best. “Uncle Allen, my mother, Uncle Charlie, Doris, Uncle Hal—and Aunt Pat served spaghetti for supper. Spaghetti was an exotic treat in those days. Neither Doris nor I had ever eaten spaghetti, and none of adults had enough experience to be good at it.” (Baker 268) It was at that moment that Baker knew what he was going to write about, the warmth he felt while being around his family and the feeling of it. It was at that moment too that baker knew that he was not going to write for Mr. Fleagle but for his own enjoyment. I remember as a child having fun experiences with my family and wanting to be able to experience them repeatedly so I would try my best to write neatly and correctly in my journal the details of what happened, who was there and why it was special to me. After turning in his paper, Baker was sure that he’d get a failing grade, but what happened next shocked him. During one of the classes instead of returning his paper Mr. Fleagle read it out loud to the class and the class was beginning to become engaged in the story that was being told.

In the end, regardless of who taught us how to become literate or which method we used to become well-educated, each of us finds our way to literacy. Though the levels of literacy might vary from each individual, we still have a motive and drive to learn. Whether it be through complicated thought out plans, learning to appreciate literacy through writing for oneself or being inspired by another person, there are countless reasons to become or not become literate. By reading these passages and interviewing a senior of mine I learned many things: that there is no one way to becoming literate, literacy used to be dangerous for American Americans, how a person’s upbringing could affect their decision to become more educated, how a person could become a writer by being inspired by one writing assignment, how much learning to read and write could impact a person’s future. With that in mind I want to continue going to college to further my education, began reading more than just mystery books, and to begin writing reflection blogs about articles I read online.

Is School Really Worth the Effort?

By Mon'tra Qualls-Woods

Is school worth the effort? Is school worth the time? Is school worth the money? Why do kids continue to go to school if they know that they're going to be handed "meaningless diplomas?" In the essay, "In Praise of the F Word," Mary Sherry states, "Tens of thousands of 18-year-olds will graduate this year and be handed meaningless diplomas" (216). Sherry is saying, that those diplomas that students receive, mean nothing because a student with a 4.0 GPA will be handed the same diploma as a student with a 2.5 GPA, which defeats the purpose of working hard. Barbara Jordan, "Becoming Educated", describes how she had to go above and beyond just to be successful. Jordan touched on what Mary Sherry did. I agree with both Sherry's and Jordan's view on education; in order to not have a "meaningless diploma" we, students and teachers must work harder, must hold each other accountable for their actions, and we must eliminate all distractions that can cause a student to be unsuccessful.

First we must make sure we work harder than everyone else. "...I would have to work harder, and study longer, than anyone else" (Jordan 214). Jordan is saying how we, students and teachers, have to go above and beyond in order to reach our goal, which should be educational perfection. She's saying, we have something to prove. We have to become actually educated and can't just get by with "...spouting off" (215) as she put it. I completely agree with Jordan. A lot of students do not take school seriously enough. We spend most of our time either texting or on social media or simply just not doing work. We should be in the classrooms learning, when we should be in the library studying or when we should be using the materials we learned in the classroom. School has become more of a day-care, where students can get away from their parents for eight hours and do whatever they want. Instead of teaching, and making sure that students are going above and beyond, some teachers have taken the role of "friend" in the classroom and have allowed students to do whatever they want to do in class. One day, a friend of mine was in class and he said, "I only come here because my mom said so." That made me think: Why even bother to come to school, if you're not going to put out 100%? Why come to school if you're going to just sit and not learn? Personally, I always put my best foot forward because hard work will eventually pay off. To illustrate, I remember my sophomore year of high school I genuinely thought that I wasn't going to be able to reach a 3.5 GPA by the end of the semester. I had to find my inner determination to work hard, to study longer and to be the best by not going to parties on the weekend, by sitting in the front of the classroom and by actually listening to my teachers, and surprisingly, I ended the semester with a 3.7 GPA. This shows that hard work pays off; however, we as students must start holding ourselves accountable, our teachers accountable and our administration accountable.

Another way to make teachers and students work harder would be to hold them accountable when their work is not up to par. In the essay, "In Praise of the F Word" by Mary Sherry, it talks about flunking students. A quote that stood out to me was, "I don't move seniors, I fail them" (216). The authors talks about how her son was at risk of failing his senior English class and how the teacher held him accountable for not studying longer or working harder than everyone else. It is crucial to the American educational system that we have teachers that actually care about the next generation, teachers who love what they do and teachers who hold students accountable and push us to our limit to ensure that we are successful. I believe some teachers believe that it's okay to receive a D on a paper and tell you "its passing." We need to raise the bar, and make the grading system that only As, Bs, and Cs are passing, and anything below those are considered failing. This will make students reach for that higher grade and make them want to be more successful in the classroom. It will also give them a sense of accountability.

We also must hold teachers accountable. Administrators need to evaluate teachers more and give them more constructive criticism. If a teacher cannot demonstrate that they are able to teach a classroom in an effective way where the students are learning, they should be counseled. For instance, I was in fourth grade and I had an awful teacher. She would always say that she didn't need us and that she was going to get paid regardless if we learned anything or not. She would also sometimes spend all day texting or talking on the phone, which means she wouldn't teach. She would hand us a worksheet and say, "Do this before the end of the day." Teachers like that are those who are hurting our educational system and poisoning the minds of our youth and should be

fired. In order to end this ridiculous way of educating we must make teachers like their jobs more by: offering incentives, bonuses, more paid vacation hours, and a higher starting salary.

In addition, we must eradicate all distractions that can cause a student to fail. Like I stated previously, school has become a day-care or an eight hour vacation where students can come and do whatever they please. In Mary Sherry's, "In Praise of the F Word", states, "...before a teacher can expect students to concentrate, he has to get their attention, no matter what distraction may be at hand" (217). Sherry is saying that we have to get rid of things that make learning difficult for students. We need to be stricter on the use of technology in the classroom because although it can be efficient it can cause major distractions to a student's education. I completely agree with this statement. We need to take out distractions including cellular devices. Also, if a student is being distracted by other students we can sit them in different seats far enough where they can't distract each other. We also need more home counselors, people who make sure that no distractions at home are causing students to miss out on education and learning. In the classroom, student can also be their own distraction and we need to make sure we help them with those distractions while helping with their strengths and weaknesses. To demonstrate, I recall when I was a freshman in high school. I loved my cell phone. I couldn't go three minutes without checking social media, responding to a text, or trying to put my headphones in to listen to music. I had a teacher who came to me and simply said, "That phone is controlling you, and you don't control the phone." That day was a great awakening because it made me realize that while I was on Twitter or Facebook, I was missing valuable lessons being taught in the classroom. I also realized that my phone was hindering me from studying longer, working harder and if I stayed on that track I would've been the one of the many students with a meaningless diploma.

I don't believe the American educational system is entirely horrible; however, we need a lot of work. We need to take out all those teachers who don't care and put in teachers who actually want to enhance and educate the next generation. School shouldn't be about who got the highest grade or who can sound most intelligent but about who actually is being educated and about which students are actually using what they learned in the classroom. We need students to feel how Barbara Jordan felt in "Becoming Educated," when she states, "...I'm being educated finally" (215). We need students who actually are hungry for education and who wants to be successful. We also need teachers who say, "...I flunk them" as Mrs. Striver said in Mary Sherry's "In Praise of the F Word." The educational system is a two-way street. No one side is to blame. We, students and teachers along with administrators must take on our own responsibility by working harder and studying longer, holding each other accountable, and eliminating all the distractions that can cause us to be unsuccessful. If we do these things, America can eventually claim the seat of number one in education.

It's Not My Fault

By Darin McCracken

I will take the blame for education in America being below standard. It is time for someone to finally stand up and take ownership of this educational crisis in America. Now that everyone else is blame free, can we please move on to correcting the problems with our educational system? With a little help from Benjamin Barber, the author of the essay “America Skips School”, and the writer of “The Big Score”, Daniel McGinn, I plan to lay it out before you. Because it really seems to me that in this great debate over how to fix education, all that is truly getting done is finger pointing. Society not only refuses to take control, they want our children to have the easiest road possible. The cherry on top of this crap sundae is how our society believes it is solely up to our government to change the issues they are confronted with in the educational system. The only way Americans will ever make headway in the struggle to shore up the educational system is to allow the educators to educate, teach our children that life is not always a cake walk, and take back control of our students’ destinies by getting more involved in their everyday lives.

The time has come for the American people to let the true educators lead the educational revolution. No longer shall we live under the tyranny of stupidity. Children are the future, it is time to set a higher standard of learning for them to fall in line with. In “America Skips School” Benjamin Barber says it best, “Schools can and should lead, but when they are confronted with a society that in every instance tells a story exactly opposite to the one they are supposed to be teaching, their job becomes impossible” (Barber 232). It is pointless for educators to teach any curriculum if the rest of America will not support or back the educators in what they are teaching. These roadblocks that our society continues to put in the path of our educators must be removed. Parents, students and teachers need to come together as one and lead our country back to prosperity. As a parent of five, I believe that it is up to me and other parents to teach our children that if something is worth having, it is worth working for. By setting better examples for our youths in this country, we can start the ball rolling in the right direction. Teachers need to be allowed to be creative in their approach to teaching. Like my Eighth grade Social Studies teacher, who created a Trivial Pursuit like game called “Wagon Train”. He came up with this idea to enhance our learning experience about the settling of the west. Most teachers have a passion for teaching that they use to inspire their students to learn. Culture change is not easy, that is why it is going to take the effort of everyone in this country to build a better educational system in America. Teachers are the ones working hand in hand with the students, therefore they are best suited to decide what will educate the students. Not a group of people sitting in a conference room pushing their personal agendas on the people of this country. So my fellow Americans the first step towards this rebuilding is to let the educators educate.

The second step in this project is to teach our children to take pride in themselves, to let them know that it is alright to be outstanding, and to strive for greatness not mediocrity. New York City’s school chancellor, Rudolph Crew hits the nail on the head in the essay “The Big Score” by Daniel McGinn when he said, “This is high anxiety, it is not for the meek of heart. But I think it’s the right thing to do” (McGinn 263). Kids and their parents are going to find the road to getting educated to be quite mentally challenging, which is best for everyone in the long haul. There probably is not a truer statement when it comes to how parents, teachers, and administrators should feel about the education we are giving to our children. It is not alright to allow our children to be satisfied with being just mediocre. As a parent, I want my children to be the best that they can be. I am constantly telling and showing my children that no matter the task, they must always give it their best. Whether it be school work, chores around the house, something they might be getting paid for, or just playing in the back yard, that doing it to the best of their ability brings the greatest rewards. I believe that our society needs to get back to rewarding those that strive to be great, and get away from the idea that every child should be treated exactly the same. The practice of every child getting a trophy, being told they did great even when they didn’t, and being so self-conscience about hurting someone’s feelings because that person didn’t win has got to stop. We need to instill the drive in our children that our country’s founding fathers had, that desire to do whatever it takes to succeed, not to sit back and wait for someone to do it for them. Daniel McGinn seems to be agreeable with his statement from “The Big Score” in this passage, “Parents like Jay Rehak, who’s also a Whitney Young teacher [a school in Chicago], fear that their kids are suffering for the sake of the system. When his daughter faced her first

high-stakes exam She came home panicked every night” (McGinn 265). Albeit not a good thing for children to be panicked over school work, they should feel a sense of urgency and importance. I feel a big part of parenting is teaching my children that hard work and effort is the only way to be successful. This is why I get up at 4:00 every morning to go to work, then work all day, come home and go to school to continue my education. Our children need to be prepared for life in the real world, we can’t continue to coddle and shelter them. Teaching kids that life is not always going to be easy is not being mean or uncaring; it is getting them ready to handle the pressure of life in the real world.

The third, and what I feel is the most important step in the educational revolution, is for parents to take an active role in their children’s life. I don’t mean just providing food and a place to live. I am talking about actually becoming involved in the things your child is doing. Benjamin Barber makes it very clear in “America Skips School” when he says “Finally if we were serious, parents, teachers, and students would be the real players while administrators, politicians, and experts would be secondary, at best advisers whose chief skill ought to be knowing when and how to facilitate the work of the teachers then get out of the way” (Barber 238). If Americans truly wanted a better educational system then the politicians and so called experts would let the parents and teachers decide what the students really need to learn. Parents, students, and teachers all need to be on the same side together. They all need to communicate openly with each other and move towards what’s best for the kids. Groups such as Parents as Teachers and the PTA are groups that are helping to pave the way for better communication between parents, students and teachers. These groups get everyone involved in the success of the students, which is the ultimate goal. My wife and I keep a direct line of communication with our children’s teachers so we can keep up to date on what’s happening in their classrooms. We cannot count on someone else to have the best interest of schools and education in the forefront of their minds. It is our job to take care of what benefits us, which is to do our part to help upgrade education and schools. Parenting is not sitting on the couch watching television while your child does whatever he or she wants, whenever he or she wants. Parenting is helping your children grow to be a productive part of society, and teaching them the difference between right and wrong. I tell my children every day that I love them too much to be their best friend. I see way too many kids that are out of control because the parents are more worried about being their kid’s buddy rather than their parent. I need to be able to stay objective, when their friends are only going to tell them what they want to hear. The best way to teach a child is by being a great role model for them, not expecting the people on television to do it for you. Parents need to step up and lead their children into the future, instead of just tagging along for the ride. Take control of your student’s destiny and help them strive for greatness by being a major part of their learning process.

The way our educational system in America is set up and ran has always been a highly debated topic. Unfortunately it is more about the debate now a days, rather than actually improving the overall learning system. It is time for everyone to take some of the blame for the failures and some of the credit for the successes. Once this happens then we can all move on to the most important part, raising a smarter and more successful generation than what we are today. The American people need to start allowing the educators to educate, teaching our children that life is not a cake walk, and taking control of our student’s educational destiny by getting more involved in their everyday life. Pointing fingers and complaining has got us absolutely no-where, the time has come to rebel against the old system and start building a new road for future generations to follow. Come on, America, I know we can do it; all we have to do is decide that this is what we truly want and make it happen.

Momma Made Me Do It

By Alexia Williams

According to James Baldwin "Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them" (578). This means that children might not always do as they're told, but as their parents do. In life all children hear the saying they're acting just like their parents. That is because they are imitating their role models. Role model doesn't necessarily mean parent. It just means someone that is looked up to. Role models can have a good effect or a bad effect on life. In *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, the author reveals to us a story of two men both named Wes who shared the same name and problems in their early childhood who ended up with extremely different outcomes. The author Wes became an extremely talented scholar and a graduate of military school and the other Wes became a drug dealer then later an inmate at a prison for murder. Our author Wes had a good role model: his mother who sent him away to Valley Forge Military School so he could become a real man and get away from the streets of Baltimore. His mother (Joy) was a good role model who pushed him to succeed in life. My role model is my mom (Nikita) and she has helped me through life and got me on the right journey to be successful as well. Like our author Wes's mother, my mother has also helped me in hard times to persevere, she has worked hard so our family can survive, and she has moved me from bad situations as well.

Like Wes Moore's mother (Joy), my mother helped me through my wild behavior and taught me to persevere. When I began to reach the age of my double digits I was at a place where I felt like my whole world was crumbling down on me. My dad had been incarcerated for years and we had just received his sentencing, 271 years. The moment I heard those words was when my horrible behavior began. I started to act out in school, talk back to my mother and I began to feel like I didn't care about anything. This was similar to when Wes was acting out in school, skipping school and when he hit his sister. Because of my behavior early on in life my mother decided to send me to counseling. Wes's mother tried to give him a chance to get right and so did my mother. But my failing grades really began to strike my mom and so did Wes's with his mother. Wes's mom stated, "Well your grades obviously aren't bad because you can't pick this stuff up or because you are stupid, you are just not working hard enough" (Moore 75). Wes could pick up song lyrics he had just learned the day before but he wasn't doing well in school. Like Wes's my mother was worried too. My mother began to spend more time with me and help me with my homework. Even though that wasn't what I needed, it helped because she was there with me. My grades came up and I started behaving better. I guess it was because I felt my mother's complete support. But Wes's mother had a different plan: he got sent away to military school.

Like Wes' mother (Joy), my mother moved me so I wouldn't become consumed by the hood or another statistic of the neighborhood. I had always had a hard life and I used to live in a really bad environment like Wes Moore and his family. Living in the St. Louis City you couldn't walk to the corner store for candy without seeing a thug with his pants pulled below his waist and smoking a joint trying to holler at a girl with a big booty. When the thugs smiled they had a grill that covered all the visible white in their mouth. I lived in the downright dirty hood. My mother worked hard to get us out of there just like Wes's mother did to get him away from Baltimore. Our situation was getting far too dangerous to stay. Similar to Wes' situation it was no longer safe. Like the author said, "Our neighborhood was getting more and more dangerous; there had been a rash of break-ins in the houses around us. My mother slept in the living room to stand guard, she said. She was determined to protect us" (37). A mother will always do what she needs to protect you even if it means moving you away from all the friends and familiar things that you know. My mother like Wes' mother moved me away from the city and into the country with grandma but we were still in St. Louis; I didn't move to another state.

After the move just like Wes' mother my mother had to get multiple jobs to make sure her kids were okay. She was in a single parent house because my father was too childish too man up to responsibilities so she had to do what she had to do. Like Joy, my mother worked multiple jobs to make sure that her kids were well supplied for. The difference was my mother didn't have a completed high school degree so she got dead end jobs in factories, and at temp services. She didn't get the professional jobs like Joy. Like the author states, "She worked multiple jobs, whatever she could to help with growing expenses" (47). Working these jobs eventually made both parents become tired quickly because work was endless and I never really got to see my mother but I

appreciated it. The older I got the more I noticed a change and my mother as I did so did Wes. The author states, "She had started to gain weight and what had once been a sprightly step had begun to slow. Perpetual bags hung under her eyes. I watched her as she walked by me, looking worn, almost defeated" (36) She couldn't be defeated; she still had her kid so like most mothers do they both kept pushing forward. I noticed the change in my mom, bags under her eyes, and the need to always put her kids first as well as Wes' mom did.

In *The Other Wes Moore*, by Wes Moore the author shows he became an extremely talented scholar and a graduate of military school. Our author Wes had a good role model, his mother, who sent him away to Valley Forge Military School so he could become real man and got him away from the streets of Baltimore. His mother (Joy) was a good role model who pushed him to succeed in life and now he is happy in life. He is married with a college degree and inspirational to people who read his book. She sent him away, taught him to never give up, moved him from bad situations, and she worked hard so he could have a better life. My mother was similar to Joy because she did all the same things for me. Since our mothers took actions to make us do better, we have both finished high school and gone to college. Like Wes, I am on my way to becoming a well-rounded individual.

My Books, My Escape

By Broderick Tate

Books and stories can take their readers through fantasy worlds, or throughout historical events that have long since passed. My childhood was spent reading a plethora of books, from the works of Mark Twain to the works of Tolkien. I would explore the worlds these writers had crafted and penned. I was never an athletic kind of guy, and while I got along well with other kids, I never wanted to invite anyone to my house. My parents didn't take well to any of my friends. With their disapproval, I was also forbidden from going to a friends' house as well. Consequently, the books I had as a child were perhaps the most important belonging I have ever owned, not for what they were physically, but rather what they represented to me. They provided a means of escape, a way of stimulating my imagination, entertaining myself in the absence of having close friends, and inspiring me to write.

Reading had become a sort of defense mechanism that let me escape my problems. My mother was more willing to buy or get a new book from the library for me, rather than a video game. She was content with getting the books for me, usually with a sigh "Alright, alright. At least these keep you out of trouble". When I would get a new book, I would spend my spare time reading it. After school, I would spend my time reading in an attempt to avoid my parents. My father was emotionally abusive, so the less time I had to spend around him the better. Reading provided me a way to distract me from my home life. Staying up late at night to finish a book became the norm whenever I had something new to read.

The books I had read provided the ground for my imagination to grow, and I'd often play pretend to experience the worlds from those books. One day I'd be a pirate, and the next I'd be a knight. My mother would often tell me to quit playing around and do my chores only to get an "Arrrr, pirates don't have chores" out of me. Every now and then, I would get one of my younger brothers to play along. One of the most memorable moments of childhood play was when one of my mother's earrings had gone missing. Having just recently read a story about a detective, I took on the case. While my efforts were in vain, they did show how the books I read were affecting my imagination.

Around the time I was in the 3rd grade, most of my closer friends had moved away or had gone to different schools in the county. The kids I knew were more interested in playing football or video games, and while I did enjoy playing games with others, I was terrible at sports. While not terribly shy, I found it hard to bond with the other kids when my interests were more into reading than sports. The few friends I had managed to make didn't mind, and frequently asked if they could hang out at my house, and the result was always the same. I did not want my friends to meet my family as I was sure the snide remarks I often heard from my parents would scare them away or even make them stop being my friends. Likewise, after my parents shot down the thought of going to a friend's house several times, I stopped asking and would just make excuses as to why I couldn't go. In the absence of hanging out with my friends, I would stay home, build a fort out of blankets and pillows, and read by myself.

My fascination with books eventually sparked my interest in writing. During my teenage years, I had begun to lose interest in simply reading, and longed to write a story myself. Writing came naturally, and just as easily as I could hear myself think, I could piece together a detailed setting. Writing had become like a second nature to me, and throughout high-school I found myself doing world-building by coming up with the history, an overarching theme, and characters for the setting. One of my teachers in high-school became interested in my writing after I had left a notebook full of footnotes for a story I had been working on. With encouragement from this teacher, I began submitting pieces of writing to different scholarships. Recently, I interviewed this teacher to find out why they took such an interest in my writing, and me as a student. She wishes to remain anonymous, so I'll call her Mrs. N. When I first contacted Mrs. N, she was in a bit of a shock. "Time sure flew by, to think it's been ten years since you were one of my students." After a polite exchange of greetings, I popped the first question; why did Mrs. N take interest in my writing? "That's an easy one. You wrote well enough that I thought

you were cheating somehow. You had an excellent eye for detail, and took criticism well”, Mrs. N replied with a laugh, giving a brief pause before continuing, “those qualities were why I pushed you to submit your writing to scholarships that required an essay.”

These days I don’t have much time to read or write on my own time, but it is definitely hard to think of any other belonging that affected me more than the books I had as a child. Nothing else I owned provided as much of an escape as the books and stories I read. Likewise, no other belonging shaped my imagination like my books had. I even feel that my writing would be of a much lower quality had it not been for how often I used to read.

My Literacy Autobiography

By Chrissy Reeves

I remember learning how to write on a Big Chief tablet with a jumbo sized pencil. My mom would make letters with a dotted line for me to trace, and I would fill page after page with these letters. I remember learning my alphabet by singing it with mom, and would practice along with Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers Neighborhood. I can recall all these things; however, I don't remember clearly exactly how I learned to read. I must not have had much difficulty with it, since I can't think of a single instance of struggling. I do know that I always enjoyed books. Eudora Welty in "One Writers Beginnings," tells us how she grew up with a love of books that was instilled by her parents. She recalls being read to fondly, and how her parents made sure there were always books around for her to read. Richard Rodriguez in "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," describes how his parents only read out of necessity, not for enjoyment, and that until a nun in a remedial reading program told him that reading could give him new experiences, he was disinterested in reading. He goes on to tell us that he then begins reading everything he could, and found that he could enjoy this task. Like Welty and Rodriguez, I was read to as a child, I had someone who inspired me to read, and I realized that all kinds of books could be enjoyed whether they were handpicked by me, or were an assigned reading.

Mrs. Lance, my kindergarten teacher, would gather the class around her in the back of the classroom and we would all sit cross legged on a big circle rug while she read to us. This was my favorite time of the day, and it was always exciting to see which book she would pick next. "Curious George," "Matilda," or a book by Dr. Seuss would be read to us, and before she would turn the page, she would turn the book towards us to show whatever picture was on the page. Her voice would change depending on the character in the story or the mood. Welty tells us about her mom reading to her. "She was an expressive reader. When she was reading 'Puss in Boots,' for instance, it was impossible not to know that she distrusted all cats" (298). In this way, as a child, her mother was able to capture her attention, and draw her in as a listener, much the same way as Mrs. Lance did in our reading circle.

In 3rd grade I had a teacher who really opened my eyes to reading, and I believe everything she did that year helped spark the passion that I still have today for books. She encouraged reading for me in so many ways. She would compile recommended reading lists that were age and grade appropriate and hang them in our classroom library. She set aside a "silent reading" time in class, where we had to have a book and read for that period of time. She also set up an assembly where Mary Downing Hahn, an author, came and spoke to us about her history and experience with books and stories. This was huge for me because I had read one of her books, "Wait Till Helen Comes," and it was one of my favorites at the time. After that assembly, I proceeded to go to the library and one by one check out her books until I had read them all. By doing that, I came across another book of hers that I enjoyed, "The Old Willis Place." After I finished with her books, I began to read anything I could get my hands on. Somewhere in all of the excitement of my 3rd grade career, I realized that reading, and reading well and often, not only made homework and classwork easier, but it allowed me to go places and experience things that I couldn't in my everyday life. I would picture myself in the story, often as the main character, or sometimes just as a bystander. The details of the story I would read would come alive in my head, and this allowed me to climb mountains with the characters, put me in the middle of the ghost story, or travel to another country, depending on the book I was reading at the time. Rodriguez told us, "In fourth grade I embarked upon a grandiose reading program. 'Give me the names of important books,' I would say to startled teachers" (295). He began to read as many books as he could, and would report back to his teachers his accomplishments. He enjoyed reading, but at the same time, he believed the act of reading all these books made him smarter. He read for the praise he earned and extra credit. I read everything suggested to me and more, though not for recognition, but for my own pleasure. Most of the books I read, I wouldn't turn in a book report on, because that would take time that I could use to start reading another book. I like to think that even without Mrs. Bedinghaus and her ideas to make reading enjoyable, I still would have found my way, and developed my passion for reading, but who knows.

As I got older, and entered middle school and high school, my love for reading endured. It was one of my favorite past times. I would read a horror story from Stephen King, and then turn around and read a teen book like “Sweet Valley High,” or one of the “Babysitters Club” books. Some of those I would read for pure entertainment, but occasionally there would be a small piece of wisdom that could be gleaned from the reading. Also, while my fellow classmates would complain about reading the latest assigned chapter in “The Outsiders” for English class, I had secretly finished the whole book and liked it. Even though the time period in the book was one I couldn’t relate to, I could relate to the conflicts described in the book, because no matter what era we are in, we still face issues between certain groups. “To Kill a Mockingbird” was the same way. It was a story from another time, but the message I got from that book is one that remains true still today. It was interesting to me that though these stories took place in a different era, they were still relatable. Rodriguez told us, “But often those writers I enjoyed most I was least able to value . . . A book so enjoyable to read couldn’t be very ‘important’” (296). He believes that if these writers who could make a book fun to read, and easy to like, couldn’t be considered to hold much significance. That cannot be true because I enjoyed my assigned English readings even though they weren’t necessarily considered fun reads. He didn’t understand that every book did not have to have some higher purpose, or grand idea. Sometimes a book is just a story, simply meant to be enjoyed. You don’t always have to get a powerful statement, or a dawning sense of wisdom from reading it. The only thing that matters is that you get something from it. Every reason we have for reading is valuable.

So, even though my experiences don’t mirror Rodriguez’s and Welty’s exactly, there are similarities found, just like there probably are with most of us. If we look hard enough we can identify with many others histories. One day, my own children may compare their experiences with mine, and possibly find that there are certain commonalities. My middle daughter already has my love for reading, and interestingly, met Mary Downing Hahn in elementary school, like I did, and enjoyed it every bit as much as me, coming home with her own signed copy of “The Old Willis Place,” that she treasures to this day. From reading circle time in kindergarten to my 3rd grade teacher, to the perils of high school assigned readings, all these are moments that stand out to me as having shaped me as a reader. As Welty tells us, “Learning stamps you with its moments. Childhood’s learning is made up of moments. It isn’t steady, it’s a pulse” (302). Here she is explaining that none of us can describe our learning process as a linear ongoing thing, but instead remember the significant moments that serve as a turning point for us. This is so true. The moments I remember as shaping reading for me are just those select few, however they were important enough to me that not only does the memory of them stick with me today, but so does my love for books.

My Love of Books

By Chris Kelley

Reading opens doors in to worlds that we don't know about. Stories can entertain, allow us to escape reality, or teach lessons about anything we want to know about. Reading truly is the key to education. Richard Rodriguez an author and journalist, talks about his path to literacy in his essay "The Lonely Good Company of Books." This story spoke to me because I was an avid reader as a child and I found much in common with the author. As we grow into adulthood, we go through many stages and changes; the same process applies to becoming literate.

Some people including myself grow up being read to and as soon as I was old enough, reading every chance I got. Other people come to love literature in other ways. In his essay, Richard Rodriguez tells the story of learning how to read as a child. The author explains about how he went from being bored by reading to reading everything he could get his hands on. As he tells us about the change of heart, Rodriguez says,

Then the old nun would read from her favorite books, usually biographies of early American presidents. Playfully she ran through complex sentences, calling the words alive with her voice, making it seem that the author somehow was speaking directly to me. I smiled just to listen to her. (294).

As a child my mother taught me how to read and she read to me all the time. What I got from my mother the author got from the nun. In our family books were very valuable and respected. Birthdays and Christmas we always got books in addition to toys. I remember uncle John giving me an ancient copy of "Treasure Island," I read it and to this day it is one of my prized possessions. While Rodriguez and I both had a love of reading instilled in us at a young age there are some differences as to how that came about.

My parents were both avid readers. However, with the author that was not the case. My dad has a huge library. Many of his books are leather bound and smell very nice. My brother and I were encouraged to read any of them we liked as long as we treated them with respect. To this day my dad always has a book he is reading, mostly biographies but lots of other books too. So my early reading experience was different than the authors. Rodriguez states,

For both of my parents, however reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible. Nor did I see them read for pleasure. Their reading consisted of work manuals, prayer books, newspapers, recipes....(293).

My parents were polar opposites of the author's statements. Sure, we had newspapers, bibles and recipes, but our house was full of great literature as well. What Rodriguez got from the nun is what I got from my mom and dad in reference to the time they spent with me teaching me to become literate and a critical thinker. The time that the nun took to make Rodriguez understand the value in books and the doors they open, may be the best thing that could have ever happened to him. From the point that the author made that connection, our childhood reading experiences sound very similar.

As I grew a little older I would go to the library every week and check out the maximum number of books allowed. The librarians would ask me if I was really reading all of them. I would read a whole book in one setting. I read all kinds of books. The Little House on the Prairie series, the Chronicles of Narnia. Most of these books are geared towards kids, Rodriguez says, "So I read and I read and I read. Librarians who initially frowned when I checked out the maximum ten books at a time started saving books they thought I might like" (295). If I could write as well as Rodriguez I could say the exact same thing. In fourth grade I also graduated from kid books like the "Chronicles of Narnia," to adult books. I read the leather bound classic books my dad had. Moby Dick, The Scarlet Letter, Ivanhoe, Robinson Crusoe. I loved Rudyard Kipling and Jack London. I

remember crying when I read *White Fang* and he almost dies in the fight. I may have still been a bit young for some of the books, but I was learning so much. I felt like a sponge absorbing knowledge. I started getting biographies of famous men at the library. At the time we lived in Virginia and early American history seemed to come alive for me. Williamsburg and James Town were not only places I had read about; I got to visit them as well. I read everything I could get. At the time we didn't have video games or many of the things kids have today, but I just loved to read. As I got older my reading habits changed again.

In my teenage and young adult years, I gravitated more towards modern novels. I read as much Tom Clancy as I could. I would buy his books in hardback as soon as they came out. I was building my own library. I still had all of my old books, but I was increasing my collection. As I got more responsibilities and commitments my reading habit slowed down. I no longer had the time to read for hours and hours. Work and study took up my time. I would still get a book for vacations but I didn't read nearly as often. This is also when the internet became available and there were other ways to seek knowledge. While I was in the military I had more time to read. I found that a paperback would fit in my cargo pocket. Soldiers have lots of down time; we called it "Hurry up and wait." This was a great chance to get a book out and read a bit. While in training we were only allowed to read military non-fiction. I read "Flags of Our Fathers," and "We Were Soldiers Once and Young." In Iraq there were books at all of the bases. It was sort of an unofficial library; if you wanted a book you took it. When you were done with it where ever you were you left it for the next guy and grabbed a new one. I read easy fast novels like Lee Child's series about Jack Reacher. Reading has shaped and changed my life in good ways.

As I got kids of my own I read to them often. Now I have four sons and the oldest two are avid readers and get good grades in school. The younger two don't read yet but love books and being read to. I think I have done a good job passing on the literacy legacy I inherited. Reading has proven to be a great tool as I advance in my education. I don't struggle to read and understand when we have to read 5-7 chapters in a day. I look forward to continuing my path toward knowledge and all of the great books I have yet to read. Like a professor once told Richard Rodriguez, "More than anything else in my life, these books have made me all that I am" (297).

My Watching Companion

By Sarah Bertram

When asked “What is two plus two?” the answer is well known to be “Four.” When asked to write a perfect essay, the answer is not well known or even a valid question. Writing is personal as are individuals’ experiences with writing. In “One Writers Beginnings” by Eudora Welty, she talks about her love of books since her early age. In “The Watcher at the Gates” by Gail Godwin, she describes her frequent writer’s block that she views as a Watcher. My experiences with writing are less than positive. From learning to read by my grandmother, to a school suspension, all the way to counseling, I have developed my own writer’s block that prevents me from writing much of anything for fear of what could happen.

When I was growing up I had to stay at my grandmother’s house for one year to get into the school district that my parents wanted me in. During this time she taught me to spell, as well as tie my shoes. I could pass all my spelling tests, but she was not happy when I read out loud. She would yell at me for not pausing at periods. She would say “No! No! No Sarah! You have to *PAUSE* at the periods!!” I would get so upset that I would start to cry and then pause for longer than necessary just to spite her. She always made me more upset by telling me that my pauses were “getting better.” I guess you can say that my beginnings are very different than that of Welty who said about her early childhood “I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house...was there to read in, or be read to.” (298) As she goes on she explains that reading was always part of her life, whether it was her mom reading to her, or her picking up any book she chose and reading it anywhere at any time. As I grew older and started reading less with my grandmother, but more with my mom, it got easier. Home was a place I could read if I wanted to.

As I continued through elementary school and middle school, I was living back at home with my mom and dad. Similar to Welty’s mom, who read to her before she could read, my mom tried to encourage me to read. She would read a chapter out loud to me, then I would read the next chapter out loud to her and that continued until we were both done reading for the night. I mostly enjoyed mystery stories like Nancy Drew. My teachers would tell me that they were too advanced for me because of the length of some of the books. When it came to this series I was similar to Welty who said, she read “...everything that stood before [her]...”(300) because she wanted to read anything she could get her hands on. I read every Nancy Drew mystery book I could find. This is also the year that I discovered the Works of Edgar Allan Poe. Halfway through middle school we moved to a new town. I was treated how I suppose any new kid is treated: poorly. My mom advised me since I was young that because of my small stature, when I got upset, I should write down my feelings on a piece of paper and throw it away as opposed to confronting the antagonist. This is what I did in a situation that happened in a class. A boy had a problem with the fact that I am Jewish and he directed slurs at me about it. The antagonist retrieved the note from the trash can and turned it in to the school administration. This led to my suspension for what they called “terroristic threats.” The boy calling me names however faced no discipline. This was my first negative experience that writing gave me. I went back to school a week later with instructions not to have any contact with the student, and act as if nothing happened. Life continued and I stopped writing for a few years. I still continued to read the works of Poe and that gave me the short escape I needed from real life.

Going into high school I discovered new authors that I enjoyed reading. I still read Poe, but I discovered Dean Koontz and James Patterson. They both had works that were not based in reality that I still enjoy to this day. I did not have the best times at home, but I managed to maintain my composure at school. I started writing more during the poetry section in my English class. I wrote a piece that I was proud of; however, I knew to an outside audience it would seem to come from a disturbed person, much like how Poe was perceived as disturbed. Before submitting my poem, I spoke privately to the teacher and the teacher’s aide and explained, “I am not depressed, I do not need counseling, and I am perfectly fine. I enjoy macabre writings, and that’s it.” They both said they understood what I said and after they read my work, said it was wonderful. They suggested I submit it to be published in the school’s poetry journal. In hindsight I should have known better, but I thought it sounded wonderful to have something published. I did not yet possess the “watcher” as described by Godwin. She explains one job of the watchers, “...they’d rather die (and kill your inspiration with them) than risk making a

fool of themselves.”(291). This description is a way of saying that inside your head you are so afraid of making a fool of yourself that you stop yourself from writing at all. I submitted my poem to the school publisher because no part of me realized the negative possibilities that could come as a result. I soon received an email response to my poem saying they thought it was the perfect piece to end the book with. I was ecstatic! About a week or two after the book came out, I was contacted once again by the school administration. They were concerned by the poem and issued me in school counseling once a week. The school counselor saw my clothing style choice and became more concerned because I wore baggy pants and a black zip up hoodie year-round. She told the administration that I required further counseling. I then started seeing a therapist outside of school as well.

This therapist was also concerned with my appearance and attitude that she referred me to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist met with me for no more than ten minutes before issuing me a 30mg dose of anti-depressants. I continued to meet with each one day a week. The counselor just wanted to talk and check my arm for injuries. The therapist just wanted to run personality tests. The psychiatrist kept upping my dosage of anti-depressants by 30mg a week until I was on 90mg a day and I stopped taking them. I put on a happy act for everyone until they were all satisfied that I was not longer “depressed.” All this came about because of one poem that I wrote. This experience prevented me from wanting to write anything.

I am not excited about needing to write things. I am in college now and have an almost 4-year-old so I am left with no free time to sit down with a regular book. We read short stories, either written for children, or written by Poe. In this college English class, I have read more autobiographical articles than I think I have ever read before. I still do not write more than required of me. I feel like my watcher has the same reply as Godwin’s watcher. She asked in a letter to her watcher “What is it you’re so afraid I’ll do?” and the response she found was simple, “Fail.”(292). She was really looking inside her to see why she could not write efficiently and realized that she was afraid of failure. I am terrified of failure as well as being misunderstood, so rather than fight with my own watcher, it is easier for me to not write at all. That is where I am different from Godwin. She was able to overcome her fear, where as I give into the fear of failure.

Writing is so difficult for me because writing is subjective. Even if I think something is not bad, someone else may consider it a failed piece. My story can be summed up by a series of negative outcomes from each writing experience throughout my entire public education. Since the beginning I was not positive about my literacy. I was not lucky enough to have the ambition of Welty, or strong willed enough to overcome my watcher like Godwin. I am mathematics major because math is factual. I enjoy knowing that there is a right and wrong answer. Writing does not give me this satisfaction. Maybe if I had not had such bad experiences when writing earlier in my life, I would not feel this way about writing. Unfortunately, I take my watcher with me through everything I try to write, and probably will for a very long time.

Of Isolation But Not Defeat

By Haley Kight

The Other Wes Moore: One Name Two Fates, by Wes Moore, is a book about two boys born with the same name, who grow up with comparable backgrounds and similar struggles, yet their choices led them down completely diverse paths with different rewards/punishments as men. In the book, the author Wes knows what it is like to be isolated in two different worlds—the world of a typical kid trying to come up and survive the inner city, and a kid from the inner city put in a school full of rich kids hoping to escape the all too common criminal fate by way of education. For the non-traditional student there are also two wholly different worlds one is a witness to daily: that of the normal college aged student, yet as an older pupil one is placed on an outer atmosphere hovering in an orbit only acknowledged if forced to participate in class. And that of being a non-traditional student juggling one's normal home life with that of trying to learn for a degree. While both the author and I are a part of these worlds, we cannot help but feel isolated in how we interact day to day with other students.

In May of 1997, I graduated from high school. While a lot of my classmates were looking at college pamphlets with their oysters wide open before them, I knew that if I went to college directly after high school it would have been a wasted opportunity. I would have spent far too much time sleeping during the day and doing a lot of late night socializing. I would have been wasting my parent's money while at the same time disappointing them. Flash forward seventeen years, one marriage and two kids later here I am, in college. I came here to gain a higher education, and to broaden the financial future for my family and my children. Each day though, I'm finding it oddly detaching to be the non-traditional student attempting to get an education in a college where 75% of the people in my classes are not yet even twenty-one. In *The Other Wes Moore: One Name Two Fates* the author knows of this separateness as well. All he was trying to do was get an education and the rich kids at Riverdale Country School would talk about "summering" in Greece or France. They would talk about new video games, Wes would just try to get home before the streetlights came on and the underbelly of the Bronx in the eighties took over (52). When I go to my classes, I overhear some of them talking about weekend partying, fighting with parents, or staying up until the wee hours of morning hanging out with friends. I can remember doing those same things at that age, however those days are long gone for me. While they speak of parties, I think of bills. While they giggle through halls, I worry about the flu and if my boys will have to miss school from illness. While they stay up all night hanging out with friends, I'm in bed by 8:30 because I have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to get my husband to work.

I even feel left out in the fashions of the younger girls compared to myself. It seems the trend for young college girls is to wear large neck scarves, yoga pants and Tom's shoes. While I show up most days in jeans or sweat pants, a t-shirt with a cardigan and my trusty beat up Converse shoes. Occasionally, I will throw on a scarf in a feeble attempt to blend in, as it's the only fashion accessory these ladies wear, I feel I can get away with without feeling completely foolish. In the book the author also feels what it's like to try to be stylish and corresponding to the other kids. He talks about having to create a schedule with his clothes to make it look like he had more of a wardrobe than he actually did, he would even go so far as to incorporate some of his sister's clothes. Which, while fashionable for her with zippers at the ankles, were not so much for Wes (52-53).

I really don't know how to talk to these younger kids without seeming too motherly. On the rare chance someone does talk to me, I catch myself wanting to tell them to take this college thing seriously or they will regret it when they are older. But I can't, it's not my lesson to learn, it's theirs. Sometimes my days are lonely and I feel invisible. Wes says it precisely when he talks about his mother wanting him to go to Riverdale. "My mother saw Riverdale as a haven, a place where I could escape my neighborhood and open my horizons. But, for me it was where I got lost" (48). For me college is a place where I too can broaden my horizons, and while most times it is also a place where one can find themselves, it also seems to be where I am getting lost.

Every day when I observe the students in their normal day to day I catch myself feeling older than I am. I catch myself reflecting on how I was at their age when the world still full of potential. Before the onset of real challenge, struggle and responsibility set in and a person could just be. Most days I feel lost among these younger minds. I don't understand how a cell phone can be more important than a class lecture. I don't speak emoji and I don't like Iggy Azalea or Jay Z. While they are living their days of glory, I feel mine are winding down.

Each and every day in this strange orbit witnessing these two worlds, I am not sad. I don't let any of this get to me. I'm not here for friends or to socialize. I am here to live up to a potential that I didn't get the chance to when I was their age. I'm here to do better. I am here to be better and it seems through my years, I already know better.

Pain is Temporary

By Jamela Griffin

Racial conflict has been a debatable issue for years. In fact, there are still racial issues today. Imagine living in a time where racial segregation was the law, being restricted to go certain places because of the color of your skin. From years 1880 to 1965 racial segregation laws called Jim Crow laws were in effect to separate African Americans from White Americans. In history class, I was always interested in how it was to live through Jim Crow laws. To gain a more personal understanding of living in such a tragic time, I decided to set up a personal interview with my grandmother, Ivory Griffin born in Moro, Arkansas in 1939, to hear personally about a regular day of life and how she felt during the time of Jim Crow laws.

Growing up, my grandmother lived in a small town in Moro, Arkansas where most African American families lived. Almost every family knew each other. The small town had a cotton field, dirt roads, lake, one corner store, one post office, one elementary and one high school. My grandma lived on a small farm with a chipped wooden house with 3 rooms and a kitchen. She lived with her mother, father, and four other siblings. My grandmother was the oldest of her siblings. She had three sisters and one brother. They lived pretty well for a black family because they never went without anything they needed. If they didn't have everything they needed they would go to a city about 20 minutes away called Little Rock, Arkansas to get what they needed. Little Rock, Arkansas is where most of the whites lived, and they weren't so friendly when blacks came into town. "White Americans always had this red devil's eye when you walked by and I never understood why the color of your skin affect who you were as a person," explains my grandmother with a confused looked. As my grandmother explained her story of going into the city, I began to feel a pain and sorrow for her. I wouldn't know what to do to live in a time not being free to do as I wanted.

As the interview progressed, she told me how Little Rock really grew a hatred for African Americans when the Little Rock Nine integrated an all-white school called the Little Rock Central High School in 1957. Thinking back, my grandmother in a more understanding tone revealed, "I remember seeing the Arkansas nine on the news as a little girl when they integrated the school I knew this was going to be talked about forever because of a big deal whites made about it. I just didn't understand why whites and blacks couldn't go to school together back then." My feelings toward the situation grew to be confused. I know the Jim Crow laws were to separate African and white Americans from each other, but the cruelty whites Americans did to blacks was unnecessary. Blacks were accused of anything bad that happened because of the color of their skin. Some blacks were beaten to death just because of the color of their skin. Not living in a time of when Jim Crow laws were in place amazed me of how people didn't like you just because of your skin tone.

Experiences dealing with Jim Crow laws had to be harsh and depressing for African Americans. Wanting to know the experiences and hardship of dealing with Jim Crow laws, I asked of a time my grandmother experienced Jim Crow laws herself and how she dealt with it. She reveals, "I dealt with Jim crow laws when I was around 17 years old. My friends and I went to the city to go see a movie. Blacks had to sit in a small section in the back that said, "Blacks only." The movie had a funny part in it and we laughed and this white man threw his pop at everybody in the section and said, 'laugh at that.' As my grandmother told me this, my eyes grew with shock and anger of how cruel that was. My grandmother went on to explain when they left the movie theater she tried to tell a person at the counter. He simply laughed at her. I know my grandmother is a nice and sweet lady. She never lets anyone get her out of character and was always so calm and patient when my cousins and I would do something

wrong. I feel my grandmother is a strong woman for not fighting or going to jail. She just accepted the fact that the law is the law and didn't go against it. It takes strength and courage to follow and not go against Jim Crow laws especially as an African American because White Americans were more favored and had a better living than African Americans. I think if I lived in the age of Jim Crow laws, I would be either in jail or dead because I could not let anyone disrespect me or make me feel belittled. Jim Crow Laws were the practice of discriminating against African American people. Not being able to be entitled to your own opinion and freedom is a cheerless feeling.

Ending of Jim Crow laws in 1964 due to the Civil Rights Act was a joyous moment for African Americans. The civil rights act was for everyone to be equal and no one would be discriminated against by race, color, religion, or sex. As the interview got deeper, I wanted to know after Jim Crow laws had been concluded how did it make her feel and what's the difference between racial issues then and now? In a pleased manner my grandmother expressed, "When the Jim Crow laws were over I felt free. I knew now that my kids and grandchildren wouldn't have to feel less of a person." I really didn't know or understand how living in Jim Crow laws could affect people. I was pleased that I didn't live in a time of hardship, that my grandmother didn't let Jim Crow affect her, and who she was as a person. My grandmother also added about racial issues, "Racial issues then was a law we had to be separated, now it's a choice of your own." I connected with her; she had a point that racial discrimination today is caused of your own actions. Back when Jim Crow laws were in place there were major legal, racial issues, but the law was to separate black from whites. Today racial discrimination is caused of your own actions and how you deal with something. The need to discriminate against someone because of the color of their skin is not the law anymore. The racial issues we have today are because of the matters people take into their own hands of dealing with race. For example, mixed-race Hispanic man George Zimmerman fatally shot teenage African American boy Trayvon Martin who was unarmed because he looked like he was a threat to the community. We are all now supposed to be treated equal as fair citizens but in some cases we are still dealing with some race issues today.

In 2014, racial conflicts are still around as they should not be, but not as much as when Jim Crow laws were in place. My grandmother's opinion on racial conflicts today were, "Today is much better than back then; we still have some more to achieve, but were getting better" as she said with a smile on her face. Thinking on the fact, I feel racial conflicts should not be still brought up in this day and age. What is the problem that is stopping everyone from being equal? Why are people being labeled when we are supposed to be just free American citizens? Adding to the conversation, I asked my grandmother how she felt when Obama was elected as President of United States. She announced with delight, "I was happy I got to live to see a black president. I didn't think it was going to happen. When Obama was elected it seemed to me race didn't matter everyone just loved what he could bring to the country." Acknowledging the fact, I understood what she meant; for years white Americans had been controlling and now a black president was in office. It gave people hope that blacks are citizens and they have a say. And when Obama was elected he wasn't elected because of the color of his skin he was elected because of what he can convey to the country.

Jim Crow laws are a subject no one really likes to talk about. After the great conversation with my grandmother, I now understand the low-spirited time my grandmother felt when Jim Crow laws were in place. I grew with shock of how Africans Americans were treated. Jim Crow laws were segregation of public places, schools, transportation, restrooms, restaurants, and drinking fountains. I couldn't imagine not being free to do what I wanted and have full rights as a citizen. I respect my grandmother for not being angry or bitter about the situation and through it all she still remained a woman of her faith. Her struggles and hardship of dealing with Jim Crow laws made me become more

grateful of what I have and how things are today. Racial issues are still a problem, but we are working to achieve better in society for everyone.

Picking Up The Pieces

By Sarah Burton

In the summer of 2011, two years after I dropped out of high school, my sister Laura and I were in Denver Airport preparing to board a plane for Kansas City, Missouri after a five-day stay at San Antonio Air Force base to visit her husband. Laura, an avid reader, and I wanted a book to read on the way back home so we walked into the airport bookstore. She offered to buy me a new book, but I declined reminding her that I do not really read. I spun on my heel towards the magazines to browse. Not minding what I said, Laura pranced up to me with two purchased books—one for her, one for me. The book she chose for me was *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, the book that would eventually jump start my love for a good book and a good author.

The book was not read on the plane or anytime soon after. It sat on my bookshelf, which mainly consisted of books stolen from school with a half-hearted intention to read. It remained there for over a year until one stormy night when heavy wind and rain knocked our power out. I decided with nothing better to do, I would read part of a book. My hands were drawn to *The Giver*. What happened next amazed me.

I ran through this book at incredible speed. Not the kind of reading where the words go in but the comprehension is missing, either. That is how I previously read, simply scanning the words and not engaging the in the story whatsoever. But this one was different. I was in this world, like one of the people watching the actions from a safe distance. Her words grabbed me and thrust me into a sense of bewilderment. I finally understood what all the fuss was about. Reading really does take you places that you never get to see. Fully engrossed, I fell asleep with the book still in my hands. The fact that I could read a book this quickly with this much excitement gave me new hope with reading.

I finished *The Giver* in about 5 hours stretched across a night and the following morning. After the book ended, I felt a sadness in me. This was it. That world is gone. I almost felt the desire to immediately read it again. I desperately wanted to be carried away once again to somewhere new, somewhere that felt distant but familiar as her settings had made me feel. Soon, I found out that there were three more books in Lowry's *Giver Series* and I was determined to read them and enjoy the worlds she creates with words.

When a writer can create new atmospheres, new settings, or new emotions, that is what makes the reader continue their lust for stories. In “A Good Book's Recipe” by Tanisha Logan, the author says that her recipe for a good book is “a cup of entertainment and a hint of reality.” I agree, there is a recipe for a book that is able to grab my short attention span, although me being an over-spicer, I would add a few other ingredients such as defining descriptions, a good dose of metaphor, and a pinch of mystery.

I have never been good with words. Just ask anyone in my family and they will tell you that when a fight breaks out, I lose my sense of explanation. Words cannot find me or I cannot find words, one of the two. Either way, me trying to express my feelings is a train wreck. I believe that is why I have been drawn to certain authors. When I read one of their books, I feel as though I could suddenly write a best-seller. It is very inspiring. Opposite of Richard Rodriguez in “The Lonely, Good Company of Books.” Rodriguez states, “For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible.” This was not the case in my home. Both of my parents loved to read and did so often. My father had rows and rows of books by Louis L'Amour, Zane Grey, and biographies of his favorite people and he never even made it past the 7th grade. So what was my excuse? When something is difficult or does not make sense to me, I drop it and leave it there, afraid to pick it up again. But I am thankful that Laura picked up a piece by buying me that book, the summer storm picked up another piece by making the power go out, and after an epiphany, I quickly picked up the rest, disappointed that I had dropped them in the first place.

Since that initial reading of *The Giver*, I have read all the other books in the series and found several other writers that I love. I have found a love for words and descriptions and the way they all fit together in a way to provoke emotions. Like Rodriguez, I have found a relaxing enjoyment from reading in “the blue-gray silence

interrupted by the occasional churning of the refrigerator motor... or the more distant sounds of a city bus . . .” (Rodriguez). Not to say that I can read any book, but I have discovered my staple in reading. Find what you love and enjoy the hell out of it.

Pictures To Words

By Tamara Grubb

Do you remember your favorite book your mother or father read you when you were a child? Was it a Dr. Seuss book like *The Cat in the Hat* or *Green Eggs and Ham*? It may sound surprising, but I do not recall a favorite book. That is because my parents never read to me. Reading was not a part of our home, unless it was the newspaper or something necessary. The first book I really remember reading, not just looking at the pictures, was in the fourth grade. In “The Lonely, Good Company of Books” Richard Rodriguez details his childhood reading journey. My childhood was similar to that of Rodriguez, and in his piece, “The Lonely, Good Company of Books,” he details his childhood with parents that were readers of things only of necessity. For both of us, it was outside forces that helped to transform us into people who love to read.

When I was a child, reading a book was not something that naturally occurred in our home; it was a task. I do not even recall what books we had in our house. I am sure we had a few; however, I do not remember walking over to a shelf in the living room and picking up a book to read. Rodriguez recalled, “For both of my parents, however, reading was something of necessity and as quickly as possible” (Rodriguez 293). His parents read only when necessary and as fast as possible. The only things I remember my parents reading were the newspaper and the bills that came in the mail. Reading just was not something my parents did. My mother dropped out of school when she was 16 and married my father who left home to join the military at 18. Neither of them relied on the knowledge in books to provide for our family. When I would go to my friends’ homes and their parents would be reading or they would have a home library, I thought that was weird. Rodriguez wrote, “Nor did I see them read for pleasure” (Rodriguez 293). He never saw his parents read for fun. I never understood that reading was something one would do to have fun. I always thought of reading as a chore. Honestly, I would have preferred to do the dishes than have to read a book, especially one without pictures. Because my childhood was without books in our home, I was not someone who enjoyed reading. Beginning in elementary school my outlook on reading began to change, thanks to my teachers.

By the time I was in the fourth grade, I had become another reader of necessity in our home. I remember in grade school when it was library day, I would dread it. I did not like to read. We always had a minimum number of books we had to check out and that would be how many I would check out. My books would always have the smallest number of pages with lots of pictures. My favorites were the *Bernstein Bears* collection of books. I could follow along with the pictures of the book and write a pretty good book report. Up until the third grade, a book report consisted of the title of the book, number of pages, and writing about the main character and the plot of the book. I could always give just enough detail from the pictures that my teachers counted the reports. In the third grade that began to change, quickly. Based on the reading assessments in class, I was behind a grade level for reading. For Rodriguez when he fell behind in reading, he started after school sessions with a nun, “At the end of each school day, for nearly six months, I would meet with her. Everything about our sessions pleased me” (Rodriguez 294). He felt joy having one on one reading lessons with the nun. I began to have extra reading sessions during school, but they were not fun. I recall there were about six of us that were in reading group “B”. Everyone knew that group “B” was the readers that were behind in reading. The other kids in the class would look in judgment, as if they had no struggles in school. We all know that everyone struggles in something, but when a person is placed into a special group, they tend to automatically be viewed differently by their peers. We had extra homework and for the entire school year and I was stuck in the group. For me, it wasn’t until the fourth grade, when my teacher told me she should no longer allow me to check out picture books, that I began to find books fun. I think Mrs. Klein began to see through my picture interpretation book reports. After all, how could a child who reads multiple books a week, be behind in reading? Mrs. Klein asked me what kinds of things I liked, and she made some suggestions for me to start reading. Thanks to her suggestions, I began to enjoy a few series of books, one was *The Babysitters Club* series and the others were a detective series that allowed me to pick my own ending. For Rodriguez the nun told him, “A book could open doors for me. It could introduce me to people and show me places I never imagined existed” (Rodriguez 294). This was the moment for him that someone explained that reading is fun and adventurous. Like Rodriguez, because of a teacher, I started to become a reader, for fun. I began reading more than watching television, which was my favorite hobby. In our

house, it was television or sports. I was not any good at sports, so television was the hobby of choice. However, because of the books, I began reading; I no longer read just the minimum number of pages or books just for my book reports. By the fifth grade, I even received a reading circle certificate. This also came with a Book-It coupon for a free pizza at Pizza Hut. I was so happy when we went to eat, and I was able to pay for my own meal. I was beginning to have more fun reading books than I could have ever imagined. Because of Mrs. Klein, I was no longer just a reader of necessity.

Encouragement of my teachers, not my parents, made me a lover of books. I no longer needed to be around people; everything I ever wanted or needed to know was in my books. I loved the imagination of fiction books. I would dream that I could have thought of the things I was reading. I absolutely loved the creativity that occurs when reading a good book. During this same point in Rodriguez's life he states, "I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books" (Rodriguez 296). Rodriguez was finding that reading was pleasurable. I saw in books a world that was much kinder and understanding than the world, which I lived in. When I read books, I could decide what world I wanted to explore. In life, especially as a child, a person learns that they do not direct their life. A person does not have the choice today to build a tree house or go to school; however, in a book the characters could make that choice. I love the idea that through a book, I could escape from my bedroom. For my parents, especially my mother, all of my reading seemed useless. Rodriguez, quoting to his mother writes, "What do you see in your books?" (Rodriguez 295). Rodriguez's mother, because she was only a reader of necessity, could not understand why he spent so much time reading. I recall my mother asking a similar question. My mother would ask if I was reading a book for a certain assignment and would look at me in amazement when I would answer no. I do not believe she has ever understood the amazement of reading. Reading was not discouraged in our home, but it certainly was not encouraged. Because of the amazement of books, I could go anywhere or be anyone through the power of reading. Without my teachers' encouragement, I may have never become a person who loved to read.

For Rodriguez and I it was teachers and the world around us that put us on the path as readers. Both of us found that the world of books is one that we could find pleasure. As a parent, I have raised my children much differently than my childhood. My children have grown up with me reading to them nightly and watching me read books. Reading is encouraged and rewarded in our home. Although I only have slightly more education than my parents did while they were raising me, books have been a way for me to learn without a formal education. Through books, I have been able to continue learning and provide a better life for my family. Books can be much more than lonely, good company.

Reading, Writing and Other Disasters

By Deja Jennings

I would like to think that reading and writing were designed to torture the human race. When I think of reading and writing, I think of 1,000 ways to die. I don't want to portray that I didn't enjoy reading when I was younger, because in fact, I did. However, with age came resentment. In "The Watcher at the Gates" by Gail Godwin, Godwin suggests that everyone has a watcher- "an inner writing critic" (290). What Godwin means is that, everyone, or almost everyone, has overpowering voices in their head that interfere with their thoughts. Coinciding with Godwin, as I've gotten older, I resented reading and writing because of all of the roadblocks, barricades, and obstacles I faced while trying to comprehend a book or actually trying to write about it. In fact, my "watcher" was one of my obstacles itself. Not only did my "watcher" make it difficult for me to effectively comprehend a book, and give a run down about that specific book, but I couldn't write on my own as well, causing me to have to be put in special writing classes.

As an early elementary student, I loved to read and even write. Books and summaries were elementary and uncomplicated back then. How difficult was it to comprehend that the wolf succeeded at blowing a straw and stick house down, but did not succeed at blowing down the brick house? Or that Goldilocks breaks in to the bears' home, eats their porridge, and lays in all of their beds? Pretty simple. I enjoyed reading about those types of stories, and examining all of the vivid, and very detailed illustrations. I enjoyed the book as a whole. I enjoyed being able to pronounce every little word. Most importantly, I enjoyed the fact that I was able to read on my own, and didn't have to have any one read it for me. I was even able to write about what I read with no complication. In the 5th grade, we were assigned monthly book reports on a book of our choice. I remember the time I chose "The Watsons go to Birmingham." I successfully constructed my book report, and received an A. I understood the material I read, so writing about it was not complicated. In fact, it was actually fun to give my point of view of the book in my own words. It was almost as if, I was re-creating the book as I saw it. My watcher didn't exist during this time period. I didn't know what it felt like to have a "restraining critic who lives inside me" (Godwin 290). I didn't have any voices inside of my head holding me back from spilling all of my thoughts out. As far as writing, Godwin additionally states "my watcher adores stopping in the middle of a morning's work to drive down to the library to check on the name of a flower or a World War 2 battle or a line of metaphysical poetry" (291). What Godwin means is, her watcher would frequently interrupt her while working. Luckily, I didn't face the same problems Godwin faced. I was able to respond to a reading in writing, hassle free.

As I have gotten older, I have grown to hate reading for many reasons. Entering high school, reading and writing became more complex. The books got longer, and difficult to comprehend, the illustrations absent, and the story line hidden behind 750 un-interpreted pages. In other words, in "The Three Little Pigs," and "Goldilocks and the Three Bears," I was able to pick up on the theme of the story almost instantly. However, entering high school, I was forced to read tremendously lengthy books, with no obvious theme, but with a theme that had to be looked for harder, or constructed and found out on your own. Reading requires deep input now. It requires analysis, synopsis, and comprehension of the text. I can't just read 7 pages and conclude that Little Red Riding Hood was eaten by a wolf. It takes a genius to analyze 384 pages of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, write a synopsis about it, and come up with a moral. I did terrible on that assignment. Every student in my freshman English class was required to complete this reading, and give a 4 page report on it. My initial reaction to this assignment was "KILL ME NOW." How did I approach this assignment? I didn't, that's the problem. In fact, I did not know how to approach it. For one, I did not have the time on my hands to sit and read 384 pages on my own. The assigned reading material did not hold my interest, and for that reason, I never completed the reading. Besides reading requiring much more thought, texts are also much more challenging to read now, including a variety of difficulty pronounced verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and pronouns. Did I mention the exaggerated use of words taken from a thesaurus? Instead of simple words like fun and happy, we are faced with convivial and gratified. The older you get, the more complicated the reading becomes of course, so authors include as many complicated words as possible, in order to keep the reading on the readers level.

Aside from the obstacles of longer books, and having trouble comprehending those books, like Godwin, I have a “watcher.” My “watcher” ensures that I am not able to effectively comprehend assigned material. At first, as a child, I didn’t have a watcher. Previously stated, I had no idea what it felt like. However, entering high school, my grade in English class and my desire to not want to read or write, gave me the idea that my reading and writing skills were damaged, and I eventually convinced myself that they were. I was unable to complete a paper on my own. My name, date, and the subject were the only pieces of information I could put down on paper. Like Godwin’s watcher, my watcher habitually stopped me from focusing, having the urge to do other things, and putting my work to the side. Godwin states “other watchers have informed their writers that: “whenever you get a really good sentence you should stop in the middle of it and go on tomorrow. Otherwise you might run dry. Don’t try and continue with your book until your dental appointment is over. When you’re worried about your teeth, you can’t think about art”” (291). Referring to writing as art, what Godwin means is that, the watcher has this idea that it’s better to complete other outstanding tasks first before continuing to write. Unfortunately, my watcher was selfish and only wanted me to focus on “dental appointments,” online shopping sprees, food, and anything else that had no relation to writing. My watcher watched me do other things. I would like to think that my watcher was there to ensure that I never finished writing, ever, like the time I attempted to start on my *To Kill a Mockingbird* assignment, and never completed it nor turned it in.

As you can imagine, this had a huge impact on my success in school. Declining grades was a major issue my watcher caused me to have. I was even forced to be put in special writing classes. “Isolated creative writing assisted groups” was just a fancy name for “idiots who can’t write on their own.” I was not happy about this transition at all. As a high school freshman, I should have been able to write effectively on my own. I felt stupid. Each time it was time for me to report to my English class, an average of 6 other students and I had to be isolated. The only good thing about the isolation group, was that the classroom were taken in to, had a surprisingly exciting comfort level. There were couches, dimmed lights, and amazing smells. My English and isolation mentor informed me that success was their biggest and only goal for us, and for that reason, the couches and smells were designed to help us. Each student had a “mentor.” I didn’t associate with my mentor that much, for the simple fact that I did not want to be there. The mentors were there to guide our writing, and make sure our watchers didn’t commit any crimes, or as I would like to think, the mentors were there to ensure that we did not get too comfortable and leave drool stains on the couches. Surprisingly, I achieved more in there isolation groups. Of course my watcher urged me to do other things, like go to the restroom and never come back, or doodle on my paper, but I eventually learned to cope and even deal with my watcher. Godwin states that she “got to know her watcher, and discussed him with other writers” (291). She means that she addressed and got comfortable with her watcher, knowing that it was something that she would be dealing with. By doing the same, I named my watcher Kamryn, and even introduced her to my other isolation mates. In isolation, everyone introduced themselves and gave the reason they were in isolation. I informed them about Kamryn, and surprisingly, I wasn’t the only one with a Kamryn, that made Kamryn and I feel a little better.

With the help of my English teacher, my mentor that I wasn’t very fond of, and my isolation mates, I learned to cope with my watcher. She eventually started to back off sometimes, and let me finish writing. I would like to think that while Kamryn wasn’t bothering me, she was napping, eating, or maybe even taking a trip to the pool. Either way, I was happy. I even learned to ignore Kamryn at times, by writing about how Kamryn irritated me. This helped me relieve my frustrations, as well as put Kamryn to sleep. By doing this, I successfully passed my English class and continued on to graduate. My watcher wasn’t so bad. Maybe idiot isolation groups were what I needed after all. Or not. Just when I thought that I was free of Kamryn, she came back my freshman year of college. Great.

The House That Raised Me

By Vicki Brushwood

“We'll fix her up,” my dad said, as he slapped me on my shoulder, his enthusiasm lost on me. The large duplex was built in the 1840's to house train engineers on layovers. Now it looked like something out of a low budget horror film: mammoth, dilapidated, and soul-less. Its peeling paint and smashed out windows, a broken image of a world gone by. This house scared me as a seven year old; little did I know it would become a testament to family, love and courage.

It was the summer of 1989 and my parents had just received word that the house they sold on contract some ten years before was being “given” back to them. The lady had cancer and was unable to make the payments. She had to move in with her family to help raise her boys. Legally the house would revert back to my parents. This came like something of a blow. My parents had just finished building a home in the country and were not financially set to take on another house. Especially one they thought was out of their lives. My mother started to cry; I think she had a wife's intuition of how this was going to play out. My dad tried to comfort her but was just as put out as she was. “We'll get the keys next week and go take a look” was all my dad could muster. My siblings and I had a fierce sense that this was going to change our lives.

As we walked into the house to further examine it, my terror went to an all-time high. The family entered through the north side kitchen. I felt like crying as the musty smells assaulted my nose. As we walked through to the dining room, floor boards cracked under our feet and my eyes fought to focus. The previous owners built a band stand on one side to cover the severe water damage, and the doors hung haphazardly off their hinges. Following through to the front parlor, years of trash and brush were piled high. Upstairs pigeons flew in and out of the house, like planes landing at an airport; cast-iron pipes had been broken off at the floor; plastic hung from the ceilings in most of the bedrooms to stop the leaks from the roof; and two by fours were nailed to the ceilings trying to prevent them from falling. In one of the front bedrooms stood an untouched door leading to the attic. The rafters were soft with water and smelled of mold. To the right was another set of stairs leading to the south section of the house. Crossing over the steps was steep and dangerous. The south side of the duplex, though similar, was in a little better shape but a lot of work was in store for anyone to live here. We walked into the south side kitchen. This seemed to be the only area where one could truly breathe, maybe because the door was open or maybe because we could make a quick exit if needed. And there we stood in the middle of the kitchen looking from one to the other. Perplexity and anger flashed in the faces I saw before me. How could anyone destroy a home like this? How could anyone live like this? What was to be done next? I had never encountered feelings of loss and abandonment before. The love my family had shown me was so strong I have never had to feel these feelings.

A few weeks later, we stood back in-front of the house, looking up at what my dad claimed to be “quality time together”. Mom and Dad, after much deliberation, had decided to refurbish the house and sell it. It would definitely not be a quick buck, but we were all in this together. Into the house we marched, my two teenage brothers, my older sister and I. The first feelings of excitement starting to play on our imaginations. What if we could fix up this house? Were we not capable of it? Had we not just built a new home? We were up for this. My dad had sparked a challenge in us, a challenge that would live in us as we faced other hurdles in our own lives, both as individuals and as a family.

We worked every weekend on the house. Pulling out brush and tearing off sheet rock. We stripped all the wiring and plumbing from the house, gutting everything we could get our hands on, showing the house we cared for it and about what happened to it. Dad said “The only way to fix a house up properly was to see how its bones were!” What we didn't know, while tearing out, we were being taught resilience and courage. Had I not been taught both of these traits at a young age, I don't think I would have handled growing up well. I could not have watched my dad be deployed for months at a time and life needing to carry on, without crying and shutting down; if I had not first learned these traits. Instead, we as a family were determined to be resilient and courageous, continuing on in the schedules of daily life.

Even though it was hard work, mom and dad tried to keep it fun. Tear out had become a game of “who’s the best hammer ninja,” and trash pick-up turned into a relay race with the shoot as the finish line. Once here, the trash would pummel down at a rapid speed and land in a trailer at the bottom with a loud “thud”. The slide always seemed like fun to me, though being of sound mind, I never asked to try to go down. Occasionally the trash would get stuck. Then one of my brothers would gingerly jump up into the trailer on top of it all and use a rake to brake the disorderly piece up. Once one side was done, it was taken apart and set up on the other side for the next round. Thankfully after weeks of demolition, we found that the under-structure of the house was mostly sound. Only a few floor trusses were in need of replacement and some of the 2x4’s in the walls were rotten out. Somehow this seemed to resemble my family: a little quirky and dysfunctional but sound and secure on the inside.

When the time came to rebuild, one of us kids was always with my dad as he took on a new project. I will never forget the time my dad and I put up sheet rock together. I was eager to help and determined to get a chance to prove I could keep up with the boys. We only had one room left to sheet rock, and dad wanted it finished that day. He took me off to the side and showed me how to read a tape measure and to properly hold a utility knife. He would measure, mark and instruct me how to cut. We worked hard together for hours. Finally on the last piece, dad wanted me to show him what I could do. I measured the opening. I then went to the sheet rock and measured the dimensions, marked and cut, only to cut it to big. Dad told me I did a good job, but he would trim it to make it fit. The funniest part was he cut too much off. We both started to giggle because he had messed up too. In messing up on his’ cut, my father taught me it is okay to fail sometimes; just get back up and try again. The love and laughter my dad shared with me that day will always be a part of me. We often recount that day and begin laughing all over again.

My mom had her own strengths to show us too. She was an organizer. I remember one such time, she put together a work weekend with all of her brothers and sisters. The main goal of the weekend was to side the house. My uncles climbed ladders and put up scaffolding, while the ground crew consisted of the aunts who measured and cut the lengths, being called out to them from somewhere over head. Cousins and siblings would take and run the pieces up to the guys. I found this awe inspiring, how one woman could mold chaos into construction. Laughter and jokes could be heard for hours on end. As children we were like sponges soaking up the strength and passions of our parents. Little by little we were bringing life and joy back into the house. It began to smile and laugh with us. The house was starting to become part of our family. It began to stand a little taller as if to say “See, they love me. They took the time and had the courage to make me new.”

One of my fondest memories was celebrating my eight birthday at this house. We had been working on the house for many months, and this day was not different. My mom and sister went to get lunch for everyone and upon returning they gracefully sneaked a cake into the newly painted south kitchen. Coming in search of us, she found us in the middle of painting the last bedroom on the south side. And we were very hungry. My brother, Jamie and I raced down the reconstructed stairs to find my sister just finishing lighting the candles on the cake. I stood there stunned. My mom started in on “Happy Birthday” as she rounded the corner, followed by my father’s strong tenor. My tears were flowing at full force by now. The family had been so busy, trying to get the house finished, I thought I had been forgotten, only to be reminded that family doesn’t forget.

Years later, the house still stands. My parents ended up selling their newly built home and moving into the house that raised me. It has become a full member of our family, standing tall in its white siding and cranberry shutters. Opening its doors to family and friends, who stop by to say hi or just need to talk. The interior design and colors have changed many times through the years. It has bounced happily from a run-down mammoth, to the single family home it is today. The house has seen many joys and tears as we grew up and moved away. It always seemed to say, “I’ll be here waiting for you, when you need a little love or a shot of courage in your arm.”

We had our highs and lows while remodeling this house, but through it all we stuck together and got the job done. We all learned to put our chins up and carry on. We learned to have the courage to rip out what needs

to change and have the faith in ourselves to be able to put the pieces back together again. This house will forever be a testament to family, love and courage, all because of a daring attempt by my father and mother to give this house a new lease on life.

The Intersection

By Darin McCracken

Life is full of choices. Do I go left or do I go right? Do I continue on this road I'm on or do I change directions? These choices and many others define who we are as people. For some like, Chris and Eileen Edlin, their roads were well mapped out for them. Eileen graduated from Platte City High School in 1970; she then graduated from the University of Missouri in 1973 with a degree in Home Economics and earned a master's degree in counseling from UMKC in 1978. Chris graduated from Platte City High School in 1967; he then graduated from the University of Missouri in 1972 with a degree in High School Mathematics Education. Others, like myself, had a more challenging road to follow. I was barely able to graduate from Olathe North High School in 1993. After high school, I then went straight into the work force for the next 21 years before returning to school at Missouri Western State University. As we travel these roads towards our education, we need guidance from family, friends, and even strangers along the way. There are three distinct routes to this education, the academic superhighway, the rocky road of hard-knocks, or the scenic route of life. All three ways get us there, yet all three ways are unique.

Family, friends, and mentors are like road signs along the highway. These signs give us the much needed direction we need to reach our destination. Chris and Eileen Edlin's families helped to make their journey a lot smoother with good directions and assistance. Chris's father, who was a very successful farmer despite dropping out of school in the eighth grade, said to Chris, "You will not be a farmer. You will go to college and get your degree. I do not want you to have to depend on the weather or the land to make your living." Chris's father felt that with a good education, Chris would have a much easier time providing for his family. Like Chris, Eileen's family and mentors, such as her high school guidance counselor, did much the same for her. Eileen's father, who had to quit school after his ninth grade year and then got his GED at the age of fifty, always told Eileen that, "The lack of a good education is a detriment." Eileen's father always thought his lack of an education had held him back and did not want his children to have to experience the same thing. Eileen's older brother and sister-in-law, who both attended Kansas University, would bring Eileen to stay with them and attend events on campus. These visits allowed her to sample life on a big college campus. Chris and Eileen used these directions and guidance to ensure a nice smooth trip down the academic super highway to attain their degrees, there by reaching their educational destination.

Have you ever been alone on a deserted back country road in the middle of nowhere, with no real directions or signs to show you the way? Well let me tell you, it is not easy to find your way. I had to find my way by taking a few wrong turns, then back tracking, and starting again. Sometimes the roads were very rough, such as barely graduating from high school. Moving on to the workforce, where I worked really hard to get ahead but never really made it anywhere. I was just working at dead end job after dead end job, knowing the whole time there must be a better way. Eventually the road would get nice and smooth, foolishly allowing me to think things were just peachy. When suddenly the road was tossing me around like a rag doll. Things started happening and the next thing I knew, I was in the emergency room with a broken leg. This accident opened my eyes to the fact that I needed a better road than the one I was on. I needed a better education than the one I was getting on this bumpy road known as the school of hard-knocks. I was definitely getting educated, like lots of others were as well, but we were doing it the hard way. We were learning to survive in a tough world, by using the trial and error method. This is not exactly the smoothest road, yet it will eventually get us to where we are headed.

Then there is the more travelled road, the one travelled by a majority of our population. The route that takes us through the good times and the bad times. This route may take a little longer, but eventually it ends in the exact same spot. Along this route we encounter a little thing called life. For some, like Chris, it's taking a job that is not in the same field as his degree. Instead Chris took a job for the same utility company, where he had been working in the summer, as a purchasing agent. Then there are people like Eileen, their job leads them to realize they need more education to achieve their personal and financial goals. Since her degree was in home economics, Eileen realized she needed a secondary job choice. Eileen then got her master's degree in counseling

to help move her career and pay scale up the work ladder. Still yet for others it is going through life, working hard and being a productive part of society, raising a family, or just figuring out who they want to be and why. All of these things lead us to our educational goals. They make us who we are, what we are. These things are truly how we all get educated. This route may not be the easiest way, but it is not the toughest road either. For most people it is the right way, by learning valuable life lessons and not rushing through to their educational destiny. Allowing them to move at a slower more controlled pace, and not miss out on the scenery along the way. It is not always the destination that is important, but the way that we get there that teaches us the most.

No matter who you are, where you come from, and what race or religion you might be, we all have choices. These choices are how we learn; they help to define who we are as people. Each and every choice is like being at an intersection. A person has three distinct routes to reach their educational destination, the academic superhighway, the hard-knocks rocky road, or the scenic route of life. All three ways get you there, yet all three are unique. Every person needs to find their own way, not one certain path can get us to where we want to be. We all have to experience things that teach us important life lessons. Every individual is different and so is their route to being educated. So sit back, buckle up, and enjoy the ride.

The Male Image

By Jamela Griffin

The book The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore, is about two boys that shared the same name, and grew up in similar environments. Both Weses grew up fatherless and engaged in criminal acts with the law when they were younger. Because both Weses were fatherless there was not much of a male role model in their lives. Growing up, both Weses got caught into the stereotypes of manhood to be masculine and to not show emotion because of role models, friends, and decisions they made in their life. Even though, the Author Wes 1 and Wes 2 shared similarities growing up as kids, as they got older they went in different directions in life. Wes 1, the author, was a Rhodes Scholar, Veteran and business man. Wes 2 was sentenced to life in prison without parole. Male stereotypes of being a bold man are caused through role models, friends and decision making. In The Other Wes Moore, the author proves in our society the stereotypes of manhood that force men to portray a certain image of masculinity and to not show emotion can be harmful and dangerous.

Males learn the stereotype of being a real man through role models they look up to in their life. My father revealed to me that most of what he learned about being a man was what he saw his father do growing up. He learned to be a protector and never back down from anything such as Wes 2. Wes 2 was the Wes in the book that took the bad route in life. In the book The Other Wes Moore, Wes 2 looked up to his big brother Tony because he didn't have a dad around. Tony was a big time drug dealer and had all the money. Tony could have anything he wanted and was well respected in the streets. The author explains, "Tony's dead-eyed ruthlessness inspired fear" (Moore 27). Wes 2 thought of Tony as a "Certified Gangsta" (Moore 27). Tony got into a shooting with some boys over a corner, needless to say it became his corner. Wes 2 seeing all the power, clothes, jewelry, and money Tony had decided to get in the drug game himself at a young age. This was a disappointment to Tony because he wanted his little brother to be better than him and go to school. This angered Tony so much they ended up fighting. The author explains, "Tony was the closest thing Wes had to a role model, but the more he tried to be like his brother, the more his brother rejected him" (Moore 72). For a male to do better, he needs positive role models in his life doing good as well. Tony told Wes not to get into the drug game but he was still into the drug game heavy himself. Telling someone to not do what they do, but still do, is hypocritical. Wes 2 only saw the material things and how much respect Tony had in the streets. Tony didn't tell Wes the bad that comes with drug dealing. Tony was the only male role model in Wes 2's life and seeing his brother sell drugs he thought that was the thing to do because he watched his big brother do it. Tony was not a good role model for Wes 2 to show him how to be a real man. Giving false stereotypes of being a man can lead someone to go down the wrong path.

Friends can influence the stereotype of manhood of being masculine and not backing down. My younger brother got suspended from school for fighting with his friends. He felt he had to be a tough guy and stay and fight with his friends. If he didn't stay and fight with his friends that would have made him a punk and not loyal to his friends. Discussing their schools, in the book The Other Wes Moore, Wes 1 was outside with his friends. Wes 1 and his friend Justin went to a better school across town called Riverdale to get a better education. The kids in the neighborhood wanted to know what the school was like at Riverdale. Wes 1 wanting to fit in, told a tale how he ran things around the school and how he got suspended for fighting. Wes 1 did get suspended for fighting, but he switched the story up to make it sound better. Wes 1 expressed, "In the hood, your school affiliation was essential. Even if you weren't running the coolest clique. You still got some percentage of your rep from your school, and the name Riverdale wasn't going to impress anyone" (Moore 49). He also mentioned, "For my friends, I decided to juice the story up a little. Or a lot" (Moore 50). Wes switched the story around to be

masculine and tough. Most males have to show an image of strong and bold. Wes 1 wanted to show he ran things around school trying to fit in with his friends. Friends are a major influence on males to have and keep a tough, solid image. My brother and Wes 1 both didn't want to be labeled as a punk or a square because of the stereotype image to be masculine and not show feelings. This is a problem because trying to keep up with a certain image can lead you to some bad decisions. My brother and Wes 1 got into trouble because they were trying to play into what they believed to be a stereotype of what a man should be. You don't have to fight or lie to fit in or prove yourself to anyone.

Following male stereotypes can lead to bad decisions. If you don't follow the stereotypes as people expect, you'll be better off and make good choices. My Father and brother have both made bad decisions living up to male stereotypes much like Wes 2, but Wes 1 took a different direction. Wes 1 changed his life for the better when his mother sent him to military school. One day Wes and his friend Dalio went to go get some pizza. Walking to get the pizza, Wes and Dalio witness a strange group of people in a car next to them. The car tried to hit Wes and his friend. Getting closer to the pizza shop, a man yelling from the car yelled, "Go home, Nigger!" and hit Wes in the mouth with a bottle, and chipped his tooth. Thinking on the situation Wes stated, "If I was successful who knew how the fight would've ended? If I failed, who knew how the fight would've ended?" (Moore 121). Wes thought of how the fight would have ended if he hadn't come to military school and how it would end because he was in military school. Wes 1 didn't retaliate which saved him a lot of trouble. If Wes 1 would have fought back because of the male stereotype to be masculine, who knows what would have happened to Wes 1 if he would have reacted. Due to Wes 1 not reacting in a violent way, he was able to finish military school and gain a tremendous amount of opportunities to become a leader and travel aboard. For Wes 2, in his situation, he decided to fight and the male stereotype of masculinity was harmful. One of Wes 2 girl's visited and over slept. Shocked at the time, she got out of the bed leaving to go home. When she left to go home, outside was a boy named Ray that was furious with why she was coming out of a boy's house. Wes was walking to the doorway. Ray noticed Wes and slammed him on his back and hit Wes a couple times in his face. Wes's face was bleeding, but he went inside to his room to get a gun. He shot Ray in the shoulder. The author expressed, "Ray was a fool for stepping to him like that; he'd started something that Wes had no choice but to finish." (Moore 105). And by finishing the fight, Wes was arrested. Wes 2 didn't have a choice but to react the way he did, because he was taught to send a message and show his dominance no matter what. Wes 1 and 2 took different paths in life. Wes 1 tried to avoid the issue by walking away and not caring what the stereotype of a man was. Wes 2 stuck to the male stereotypes and this caused him to make bad decisions and follow down the wrong path.

Each Wes takes a different road in life. Wes 1 ends up a Rhodes Scholar, and Veteran, and business leader. For Wes 2 life didn't go as well for him. Trouble always seemed to follow him. Every time he tried to better himself something always took him ten steps back. Wes 2 decided to leave the streets alone and get his GED and work a regular job. Having four kids and having to support himself, his children, and mother, Wes went back to selling drugs and later on he robbed a jewelry store with his big brother Tony. Wes 2 was given a life sentence without parole. By letting go of the male stereotype, Wes 1 did well in life. As for Wes 2, living up to male stereotypes to be masculine had a dreadful ending.

In American society, males are told to not show emotion and be tough. In The Other Wes Moore the author proves when males portray a certain image of strong and tough it can be harmful. We see stereotypes of males through radio, television, and video games. The males are always dominant. Stereotypes of males in our society can be caused by role models, friends, and decision making. Create your own path and make your own decisions. Young boys need to ignore stereotypes and embrace

responsibility, education, and hard work. Wes 1 is a good example to follow because he didn't let male stereotypes get in his way which allowed him to succeed. Wes 2 let male stereotypes get him in trouble showing he had to be masculine and prove himself to other people. Don't let stereotypes define you. Create an image for yourself.

The Not So Storybook Life

By Darin McCracken

In a kingdom far, far away the sun was shining, the birds were chirping, and everything was perfect. Wait, wait, doesn't this only happen in fairytales, not in real life? Real life is more how my story reads, rather than like a fairytale. I was born one of seven children, to be raised by a single mother. Needless to say, there was not much of my mother to go around. Unlike Eudora Welty, who had two parents that did everything they could to nurture her and her education, I was lucky to get an "I'm too tired," out of my mother. My life has been closer to that of Wes #2 from the book The Other Wes Moore. I also was educated by the streets and life rather than at an educational institution. Life has not been a cake walk, but it has made me who I am today. I may not be perfect, but like Frederick Douglass, I have used all the times I was told that I would not amount to anything, to push myself to be as good as possible at whatever endeavor I partake in. To be perfectly honest, my life has been more like a "How Not to Do It" book. So in summary, my life was a mess that turned into a life worth having.

Sticks and stones may break my bones, but your words will only make me stronger. This is a lesson that it took me a while to learn, yet it has been an important lesson. The same lesson learned by a young slave named Frederick Douglass who said "I was gladdened by the invaluable instruction which, by the merest accident, I had gained from my master" (Douglass 271). Douglass's master did not have the slightest idea that his words of determent to Douglass about learning to read and write; would push Frederick to the heights of greatness that Douglass would go on to achieve. Some very true words from a person that was self-taught because of a cruel situation caused by his enslavement. Like Frederick Douglass, I took many such words and beratings to drive my desires to prove the doubters in my life wrong. I can remember many times that my exhausted mother would come home, almost out of her mind from the stress of working to support my six siblings and I, to find that I was in trouble at school again. I would usually receive a long tongue lashing from my mother that would end with, "You are a worthless little jerk and you will never be anything but a punk." This never really seemed to hurt too bad at the time it happened, yet it always was in the back of my mind. These types of belittling and mental beat downs eventually took their toll on my outlook on school and life. The desire to please my mother or anyone else in a position of power soon left me. I became that kid in class and the neighborhood that most people didn't want to be around. As I grew older and more independent from my mother, I began to realize that I had let these bad times in my life have the control over who I was. My doubters had enslaved me with their words. This is when I decided I was going to prove them all wrong and break free from their control. I decided I no longer cared if people believed in me or my abilities, as long as I believed in myself. Much the same as when Douglass said "I owe almost as much to the opposition of my master, as to the kindly aid of my mistress" (Douglass 271). By using the words that his master had used to hold him back as motivation, Douglass was able to take the little bit that his mistress had taught him, to keep moving towards his education even when that job seemed impossible. These were tough lessons that were not at all fun to learn, yet they are the most valuable. I took this new feeling of control over my life and used it to push myself to be as good as possible at whatever endeavor I would partake in.

Control is not always something that I have had over myself or my emotions. There has been many times that my temper made a bad situation much worse. I reacted badly in many situations, much the same way that Wes Moore #2 had reacted when he was punched in the face during a backyard football game. "The lip had begun to swell, and his anger grew along with it. This was a pride issue for Wes, he had just allowed himself to be punched dead in the face, in front of his friends, by a smaller guy" (Moore 32). Wes #2 just got punched, so he then had to show everyone that he was the stronger man. "This is a pride issue", is a line that came from my mouth many times, like it had from Wes #2. Pride is not a bad thing when kept in check, but it is bad when pride over rules a person's rational thinking. Like the day in school when I felt that a teacher was not being respectful to me. So in order to keep face with the kids in class, I told her she was an absolute nobody and she was not good at her job even though in reality she was a good teacher. Situations such as this, have haunted me throughout my life. They have made my road through life full of potholes and missed opportunities. As I now try to raise five children of my own, there are many times that I look back and think to myself, the way I handled that situation would make a great after school special on how not to act in that situation. Despite the bumps in

the road, I feel that the mistakes I made growing up, serve as great lessons to my kids as what not to do.

I hear lots of people say “If I could go back in time I would change this and that.” Not me, I wouldn’t change anything from my past. My past is what made me who I am today. I did not have an ideal home life like the one Eudora Welty describes in the essay “One Writers Beginnings”. “I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me--- as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting--- into knowledge of the word, into reading and spelling, by way of the alphabet” (Welty 301). Her parents did what needed to be done to make sure she had the ideal conventional education. My mother didn’t exactly win any mother of the year awards for how she raised me. What she did do, was she made sure I was mentally able to handle what life was going to send my way. There was probably many better ways to accomplish this, but she did achieve what she had set out to do. I graduated from high school; I am one of the best glazers in the Kansas City area, and I have a great wife and kids at home. The road that I had to travel to get where I am is responsible for my education, motivates me every day, and reminds me of where I came from. It has not been easy, nor pretty at times, but I can say without a doubt that the education I received along the way here is allowing me to take full advantage of what lies before me. Twenty-one years ago there was no way I would have been able to take advantage of going to college. The long journey to this point is making that possible now. My travels to this point in life have beat me down, picked me up, and knocked me down again. I still would not change any of it, because the number one lesson I have learned in my life is that just because something is not ideal or perfect, doesn’t mean it is not worth having.

I don’t consider myself to be the luckiest person on Earth, although I would have to say that I’ve had a pretty good life so far. The sky may not always be blue, the air doesn’t always smell like a bed of roses, and I may not always have a happy ending. The things we must always remember is that despite our doubters we have to believe in our self. We don’t have to be perfect; we just have to learn from our mistakes. Most of all we have to remember that life may get messy or hard, but this makes it much sweeter when we get where we are going. So maybe life is like a storybook, it has the hero (me) the villain (the doubters), and the happily ever after (the road traveled to get educated). I would have to say that life is just like a storybook, just not always a fairytale. So don’t worry if life doesn’t seem perfect, life has a way of working itself out for the best.

The Place That Made Me Who I Am

By Katie Keaveny

If you asked most people, I feel safe in saying that I doubt you would get many responses where they would say that detox or rehab were high on their list of favorite places. As a matter of fact, I doubt that most people have ever been inside one of those facilities. I can say that I have and that it is one of my favorite places, but for a reason that you might not think. I have an amazing connection with our local detox center because it was an important step in my road to addiction recovery.

My story began as a child who was well cared for. My parents had worked hard and were able to provide my sisters and me with everything a child could have wanted. We attended Catholic schools and my parents had rules we were expected to follow. They set good examples for us. In high school that all took a turn for the worse and I started making some poor choices and running with the wrong crowd. These choices eventually led me to my addiction to pain killers.

The first time I took a pill, it was just for fun. It was like everyone was doing it and it was the “in thing” thing to do. I never once thought that I would become addicted to them, but boy was I wrong. Next thing I know I can’t live without them. Taking pills became what I did daily. The thrill of someone calling or texting me saying, “I’m good” meaning they have pills and they are ready to sell them was a rush for me. I loved the feeling of getting pills, having them in my hand and taking them. I started playing pharmacy with myself, counting my supply daily and thinking, “Ok, I have 50 pills that will last me for 2 days.”

During this time, I knew what I was doing was wrong. I understood that I was running the risk of losing everything that was honestly important to me, including my family and my dog, Bronx. I struggled because in order to keep those things, I knew I had to stop the drugs. I would occasionally try to stop on my own but detoxing was too difficult. I didn’t want a formal detox program because I hadn’t come clean with my parents yet and at that time I was hoping that I wouldn’t have to. I wanted it to be my secret and have it just go away.

As expected, there came a point where the addiction, lying and stealing caught up with me. My parents were on to my secret. I was still faced with the thought of admitting the things that I had done, and even more terrifying was the thought of detoxing. I had already had a taste of detoxing and withdrawals on my own, sometimes by my own choice of trying to stop and other times by force because I couldn’t get my hands on any pills. Detoxing is not easy, but when you try to do it without the proper medical supervision it is worse. When I did try on my own my head would hurt and I felt sick. I couldn’t eat or sleep and I had no energy at all and didn’t want to get out of bed. My only motivation to get out of bed would be to go find more pills. I knew I couldn’t do it on my own, but I also knew I had to change my path. My parents were close to cutting all ties with me and I knew that would be the end. I wasn’t sure where I would end up, or if I would even live to see the next day. I also had a sweet dog to think about. Faced with losing all of this, I made the brave decision to come clean, both with myself and with my parents.

This is when I started making the right choices. My first right choice in a long time led me to detox. It was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I still remember it like it was yesterday. It was 2:00 p.m. on a Friday afternoon in late August, 2010. My check in time was 3:45 p.m. I still remember that feeling of when I first pulled up to the center, I was so nervous. For some reason, I was thinking I was going to be in there with a bunch of old men. What would people think of me? Would I know anyone in detox? I didn’t want anybody to know I was there. To me, it was embarrassing. I finally was brave enough to get out of the car and walk up to the door, but it was locked. I thought to myself, “Great, I’m not going to get the help I need.” I’m looking around and I see a buzzer. The buzzer made a sound I will never forget. When someone finally opened the door, I walked down the long narrow hall, I told myself, “This is it. I’m leaving the old me behind and when I walk out this door again, I’ll be a new person.”

The inside of the building was nothing like what I was used to. It was not the comfort of home. The walls were cracked brick that had been painted a light blue color. The floors were a cold, dirty tile. The only windows they had were in the bedrooms, but they were all boarded up with metal bars. Each room had two beds and one dresser. The mattresses were covered with dark blue sheets and they were so flat that they felt like you were sleeping on the floor. Each mattress was topped off with a very thin pillow. In order to be comfortable every night I would roll up one of my blankets into a ball and put it on top of my pillow for extra cushion. The smell of the room reminded me of a nursing home. The food and snacks were old, moldy and hard, almost as if they had been there forever. I was able to find a box of brown sugar pop tarts that I managed to stretch out for the time I was there. To be honest, though, I wasn't very hungry because when you are going through withdrawals you really don't have an appetite for anything.

I was so scared and uncertain about what my outcome would be. The first thing I saw was the "hang out" room. There were two old brown ripped couches and an old bubble T.V. The staff took me straight into the "check in" room with two chairs and one table. It was a very plain room. During check in they asked what felt like were 1,000 questions. They told me I would have to stay at least five days and I'm thinking to myself that I didn't want to even stay one night. I was annoyed and didn't think they understood how I was feeling. The head nurse walked in the "check in" room and told me, "I know this is hard. I have been in your shoes and it takes a lot to take that first step." Those were the words I wanted to hear and they put me at ease. I was ready for this.

My sense of ease was soon replaced with the feelings of withdrawal. As I had experienced on my own, withdrawal was horrible, but this time I wasn't doing it alone. I remember repaying them the favor of asking me 1,000 questions during check in by asking them 1,000 times, "How much longer?" I just wanted them to give me something to make the withdrawals go away or at least make them not as bad. After two long hours, I was finally done with all of the questions and it was already about time for bed. Finally some relief as they gave me a muscle relaxer and Benadryl to sleep.

During the night the nurses would look in on us every hour, and the nurses' assistants would take our vitals every six hours. By the time vitals would roll around towards morning, the Benadryl would also be wearing off so I was up for good. While awake I was restless and I couldn't sit still. I would toss and turn and had a tingling feeling shooting through my legs where I couldn't keep them still. I would get up and sit on the end of my bed and just think to myself, "I will never go through this again. Never again will I put myself through this or my family."

A couple of days went by and I started feeling a little better. The withdrawals weren't as bad as the first day. I remember this thought coming to my mind, "When I was younger, I was such a good kid." I loved life, I loved being around people and I loved going out with friends but all of that changed when I was doing pills. When I was high, I didn't care what happened to me. The thought of facing the withdrawals again was terrifying, I would rather have been dead than go through something so painful. I remember these thoughts opening my mind to what I was going to experience next.

It was at this point that the center started the educational portion of my stay. During this time they taught me how valuable life really was. They showed us before and after pictures of people who did drugs and how it ruined their lives. They also told stories about people who did drugs and ended up in jail or dead; I didn't want to end up like those people. One story in particular was about a man who had had everything. He had a wife, two children, a nice house, four cars and a lot of money. He had lost it all because of an addiction to pills. He was buying pills from a drug dealer and a police officer just happened to drive by. He was pulled over with his kids in the car and a little over 400 pills in his possession. Even though he had a clean criminal record he got 15 years in prison and lost custody of his kids. His before and after pictures will always stick with me. It was like he was a totally different person; it didn't even look like him.

I wasn't fooling myself at this point. I was confident that I was doing the right thing but I was still worried about how I would feel when I got back out into the real world. The center told me that it was a good idea to change a lot about my life. Simple things such as changing my phone number or the people who I hung

out with would make my recovery easier.

After being in detox for five days, I was so proud of myself and happy knowing that I was changing my direction and that the risk of losing what was important to me was starting to decrease every day. While I was packing to go home, I sat in my cold room, looked around and told myself, "I will never be back here." I was right, I have never returned there.

This place was a life changer for me. It wasn't home, as a matter of fact it didn't offer much in the way of physical comfort. What it did offer was emotional and education comfort. It was full of people who cared about someone they had never met. They cared enough to help me through withdrawals and educate me on the best road to recovery. I could not thank them enough when I was checking out. Remember those 1,000 questions; well I thanked them for what seemed like 1,000 times. The experience that they provided me made me want to someday be an addiction counselor. It is easier to feel comfortable knowing everything will be okay if it's coming from someone who has been down the same road as you. I was very scared to stay there but now I look back and know that I wouldn't have changed a thing. If someone finds themselves in the same position that I found myself in, I would be honored to share my story with them and for my story to be the one that makes a difference in their life. If I can help one person on their road to recovery that is an accomplishment for not only me, but the detox center that support my recovery.

The Struggle

By Prince Chuck Mosley

When a child is growing up you can hear him say things like, "When I grow up I want to be a firefighter, a doctor or even a fairy princess." Never do you hear a child say, "When I grow up I want to be a drug addict." However, somehow it still happens. When I think of someone who has faced struggles in their life the first person that comes to mind is the strongest woman I have ever met in my life, my mother Angela Davis. My mother battled a horrible crack addiction for over 15 years; however, she managed to get her life back on track and get her education. The question that remained with me is, "how does someone get to a point in their life that drugs are the answer when everything you ever wanted was given to you?" Everyone has the possibility to become addicted to something, but overcoming that is about being able to take control of your life again.

My mother grew up in East Saint Louis, Illinois, right across the street from Frank Holden State Park. She was raised in a large three bedroom home. Her mother was a stern German woman who loved both of her children unconditionally. Because she grew up in Germany during World War Two, she wanted to provide her children with everything she had to grow up without. My mother explained, "My mother worked between 40-60 hours a week as an executive chef, but even though she worked so much she always made time for her children to cook dinner, help them with homework and do basic house chores so her children would not have to." My mother recalled the Christmas of 1988; it would be the first time that she would celebrate the holiday at two different homes. Her parents had gotten divorced earlier in the year. She told me that even though her parents were divorced everyone still had a very strong relationship with both of her parents because her father only lived a few blocks away. This particular Christmas was very memorable because she got double the presents. Because both of her parents worked a lot during the school week, she would usually have a babysitter when she got home until around 5. These would always be people that my grandmother trusted. It would be many, many years until my grandmother would find out that one of her best friends was the one who introduced her daughter to crack. The moment you trust the wrong person can be the very moment your life changes forever. My mother told me, "When you fully trust someone without any doubt, you get one of two results: a person for life or a lesson for life." After my mother explained the meaning of this quote to me, she told me that the woman who introduced her to crack was a person she and her mother trusted very dearly. Debra had been my mother's baby sitter for many years when my mother was a child. Debra was best friends with my grandmother therefore she was around the house a lot even when my grandmother was not around. In the summer of 1989 my mother had just turned 16 years old. She came home from school where she noted a rancid smell in the house. She walked into the kitchen where she found Debra smoking something from a small glass pipe; she had no idea what she was doing. Debra explained to my mother that she was smoking crack because it made her feel better. She then went on to ask my mother if she wanted to try. My mother was very apprehensive at first because children are constantly being told do not do drugs, but Debra ensured my mother that nothing bad would happen. My mother took the hot glass pipe to her lips and lit the other end with a lighter and inhaled deeply the smoke from the pipe. She claimed the feeling was instant, it started by numbing her chest. The numbing feeling slowly worked its way into her entire body. This single event would be the first and what my mother thought would be the last time she would ever smoke crack. She did not like the feeling it provided her so how did she become addicted?

Many years later my mother was going through an extremely abusive relationship and she needed an escape. She went back to that day in the kitchen with Debra the first time she tried crack and remembered the feeling of not having a care in the world and the numbness it provided. She wanted that feeling again. Living in East Saint Louis it was never hard for someone to find drugs if they wanted them. She found what she was looking for. The difference from the first time she tried crack was now she thought it could help her feel better, and she was right. While the high lasted for only a few minutes she felt like nothing in life mattered, and all the pain seemed to go away. The feeling was so brief that she

soon found herself spending entire paychecks to get her next fix. I asked my mother what was the worst experience while smoking crack. She paused momentarily and when she started talking again I could hear the pain and disappointment in her voice. She explained that while she was pregnant with me she ran into one of her drug dealers she owed money to. He placed a gun to her head and told her that if she did not pay him within the week he would not kill her but instead her unborn child. At this point my mother was in tears thinking about how my life could have been impacted before I was even born. We sat there on there the phone both crying because this was something I had never known. After hearing this story a question was burning inside my head. I asked my mother, "Was this the point where you decided to quit smoking crack?" Once again my mother took a breath and she told me that "sadly this was not the event that prompted me to quit smoking crack because it was not time for me to stop in my eyes, because for some stupid reason I felt like I was still in control. I clearly was not looking back on the situation." The sad truth was at this point my mother was so devoted to her drug addiction that she was destroying relationships with the ones who loved her. But all she was worried about was how was she going to get her next fix. She told me the worst point of her addiction was when she began stealing from her mother to get crack. She would take her mother's car, cash and jewelry to get what she wanted. One day my grandmother told her she did not want her around her, my sister or myself. When my mother heard she would not be allowed to see her children, this crushed her.

It would be a four year process of recovery for my mother. She did not want to go to rehab because in her mind she had gotten herself into this mess and it would be up to her to fix it. She tried to completely cut it out of her life but found that she got sick very quickly. At this point she realized that she would not be able to do this on her own. Knowing that my grandmother did not want to have anything to do with my mother until she got herself right, she had to find someone to help her. So she turned to a childhood friend who she had always loved very deeply but could not be with because she was not stable. The man named Wille wanted to do nothing more than help my mother get her life back on track and one day marry her. During those four years my mother would be a binge addict. She told me that she would go months at a time without touching the thing that had already ruined her life, but part of her still needed it. She described to me the moment that made her stop. "I was sitting in a friend's house extremely high. I started to think about everyone in my life that I had hurt. Mainly my children who had a father that was not there for them in any way and a mother who was strung out on crack for most of their lives. I decided that I need to be a positive example for my children."

She then went back to school and got her nursing degree and stressed the importance of hard work and dedication. When my mother was pregnant with my sister in 1994 she had begun nursing school and only had a year and a half left. When she knew that she was clean and would be getting her children back, she decided to go back to school. She wanted my sister and I to know that we would all be a happy family. When I found out that my mom would be going back to school I was overjoyed, because I knew this would be the final step in her long recovery process. During my freshman year of high school and my mother's final year in nursing school, we would all sit down and do our homework together. That was the year I realized how strong of a person my mother truly was. She had been through so much in her life but she still managed to come out all of it on top and I respect her so much because of it.

If it were not for my mother I doubt I would not truly know what it means to struggle. At the end of the interview I asked my mother what she would want people to learn from her struggle. She told me, "We all have our "addictions," but it is up to us to choose to keep them under control and know when enough is enough." So just because you or I do not have a drug addiction there is something in our life that too much of it can have a negative impact on your life. I honestly feel that my mother's story can be an inspiration for all because she showed me that no matter how low you get in your life there will always be a way back up. Trying to get back on the right path after you have strayed was the hardest thing my mother said she ever had to do but she also learned so much about herself and who she wanted to become. My mother is the beacon of light in my life that proves that the sun will always come up tomorrow no matter how bad yesterday was.

The Villa Ridge Castle

By Robert Scharfenberg

Driving along Highway AT, about two miles past the old Diamonds Restaurant, I turn onto Highway M arriving at the home of my youth. The fire in 1973 had turned the one and a half story wood-framed dwelling with white-shingled siding and the reddish colored roof into a blackened empty shell. She was hollow of laughter, devoid of the smells of my mom's cooking, forever consigned to wherever homes go when they die. The lasting memories of the home where I learned the value of hard work, the responsibility expected of the eldest son, and the negotiating skills required for survival with three sisters and three brothers.

Growing up in a home led by a mom with seven children was indeed interesting. Dad was seldom home being an over-the-road truck driver and I simply don't remember seeing him very much. So it was Mom who taught me through her example that if I wanted things, I needed to work for them. Raising seven kids then, as now, required two incomes. So besides the care of her children, it also necessitated working outside the home. Whether as a waitress, or as a cook in my elementary school, she proved to me that if I wanted things it did not matter if it was helping my uncle's on their farms or picking blackberries and strawberries for Fair money, there is a price for everything but through hard work much can be achieved. One example of that was once when I was about 12 years old I wanted ammunition for my 22 caliber rifle. Well the only way that was going to happen was buying with my own money which meant getting up at 5 am and walking the mile to Grandpa's farm in order to help him. It was a lot of hard work but in the end I made enough to pay for the ammo and still had a few dollars left for the piggy bank.

Being the eldest son in our family of seven I was taught early on of my responsibilities that I had toward my younger siblings. It was my job to monitor their activities while mom was at work. I remember once when the three younger brothers were playing by the creek below the house. Instead of joining them, I chose to stay at home and watch sports on television. During this time period, the youngest brother chose to go off on his own and could not be found. This all led to several hours of frantically searching for him, and ultimately a call to mom at work. She was not a "happy camper" to get called away from her job as Head Cook at St. John's School, about a 30 minute drive from home. By the time she arrived, Ray had nonchalantly reappeared wondering why everyone was upset. This was all great news for everyone but not necessarily for me. Mom and I had a brief discussion on the merits of responsibility and I learned in no uncertain terms, through the effective use of a peach branch across my backside, of my duties towards my younger siblings. It was a lesson not to be forgotten.

Survival in a family of seven kids might sound melodramatic unless you have lived the experience. Very quickly, as I was growing up, I learned the importance of diplomacy and negotiation in acquiring any advantage over two older sisters. The eldest, Martha, was constantly put in charge any time mom was at work. She was slim-built red head with a "Napoleon" complex who applied her figure-head of authority to the utmost demanding that I do everything when and how she said to do it. A good example of that was one of my seemingly endless jobs was to clean the basement on Saturday morning. Martha was employing her endless stream of comments when in an epiphany I came to realize that if I simply asked her to explain the "how" her attitude changed dramatically into someone I actually enjoyed being around. It not only relieved the tension between the two of us, but also among the rest of the family.

My mom was the hardest working person I knew during my adolescent years and a great role model to me instilling a work ethic that has served me very well during my life. The art of responsibility was taught early and often, and I have never regretted those lessons, passing them on to my own son and daughter with the optimistic attitude that all will be better for it. Her voice still rings in my ear with advice at times before I ever open my mouth on matters of respect and courtesy dealing with people. The art of diplomacy and negotiation is indispensable for surviving in the field of sales where I have spent the better part of my life. The Villa Ridge Castle may be gone but the lessons learned will stay with me for the rest of my life.



About the Authors

“My aim is to put down what I see and what I feel in the best and simplest way I can tell it.”
- Ernest Hemingway

About the Authors . . .

In the words of the students' English 100 instructors

Sarah Bertram: Sarah surprised me with our first journal assignment. It was a letter of introduction and Sarah (unlike anyone of her classmates) wrote and turned in multiple drafts of this homework assignment. Before we'd hardly begun, she understood writing as a process with writing, revision, and rewriting. Sarah is sharp and is willing to look at issues or topics from new perspectives. During class discussions, Sarah never shied away from providing a view that was unique from her classmates' views.

Vicki Brushwood: Vicki is a serious and dedicated student who will do well at MWSU and in her future career. Her essay “The House That Raised Me” made me cry the first time I read it—and that was just the rough draft. Vicki does a great job describing people, scenes and places to her readers and writing poignantly about their meaningfulness. Vicki grew up reading classics like Jane Austen and the Bronte sisters, and that comes through in her voice as a writer. Vicki's hard work and ability to push beyond obstacles in her way is inspiring to other students and to me as a teacher and writer.

Sarah Burton: Of writing, Sarah says, “It has helped me in expressing thoughts that get scrambled in my head, or getting me out of my comfort zone, which is always beneficial.” It takes hard work to accrue these benefits, so she revises and perfects her writing to achieve a well-crafted final result. From the beginning of the writing process, Sarah establishes a connection between her writing topic and her personal life, and she says this helps her succeed in leaving a part of herself in the writing. Indeed, readers will discern a clear and distinct voice in her writing, at times confessional and self-deprecating, always aware of her readers-to-be.

Patrick Flint: Patrick is an exceptional student with an impeccable work ethic. He demonstrated in my ENG 100 class that he is a “natural” at writing and thinking critically. I was immediately impressed by his willingness to succeed in my class. Mr. Flint also displayed excellent critical reading skills. He always had a unique insight into class discussions and was a natural leader in my class. I wish I had more students like Patrick. I am excited to see what the future holds for him and I wish him all the luck. I know with his determination and work ethic he will be successful in the future.

Jamela Griffin: At the beginning of the semester, Jamela was quite shy and did not have much confidence in her writing. However, as the semester progressed, so did she. The more she wrote, the more she was able to acknowledge her own talent and gain the confidence she needed. Jamela, in her essays, tackled difficult and sometimes painful issues but issues that were important to her readers. In one of her published essays, “Pain is Temporary,” Jamela interviewed her grandmother about growing up in Arkansas during the Jim Crow era. This is an important essay for it brings to light a part of our shameful American history that so many young people do not even know. From writing about the struggles of past African Americans to the struggles faced by young, male African Americans today in her essay, “The Male Image,” in response to the book *The Other Wes Moore*, Jamela has found her voice, her activism and her confidence.

Tamara Grubb: Tamara balances the life of a working professional with that of being a college student and a parent. She works tirelessly to pursue her vision of stewardship as she works to better our community and set an example for those around her. I'm glad to have had Tamara in my section.

Deja Jennings: Deja is a smart and funny student. She came into English 100 claiming to strongly dislike reading and writing. And as her essay “Reading, Writing and Other Disasters” shows, she still feels that way. However, the essay also shows great skill at writing. I’m convinced that with more opportunities to write sharp, witty pieces like this, she might change her mind.

Katie Keaveny has an important story to tell and she tells it with honesty, clarity, and admirable courage. Her willingness to share her story comes from her desire to encourage others to make a difference in their lives as she has done in hers. With a keen eye for detail and a forthright style of writing, Katie takes the reader on a vivid journey through “The Place That Made Me Who I Am.” This gripping and inspiring story is a worthy read.

Chris Kelley in his essay, “My Love of Books” proves how his extensive reading has enhanced his knowledge and his writing ability as he compares and contrasts his literacy experiences to Richard Rodriguez’ experiences. Chris puts together a very fine essay extolling the virtues of reading. It is a lesson to all of us to read and to encourage others to read, read, and read. Chris is currently “...passing on the literacy legacy...” to his four young sons. As he says in his essay, “Reading truly is the key to education.” I agree.

Haley Kight: Haley has always thought of herself as a writer and has been writing nearly as far back as she can remember. She won a writing award at Mark Twain Elementary School in St. Joseph and composed a poem that was read at her grandmother’s funeral. She has even contributed to *The Regular Joe*, a local St. Joseph publication. Haley’s writing foundation is surely her reading. She is an avid reader, and among her favorite writers are Anne Rice, Nick Cave, Allen Ginsberg, Kurt Vonnegut, Ray Bradbury, William Burroughs, Chuck Palahniuk, Shirley Jackson, Sylvia Plath, and Anais Nin. She says she loves novels and short stories and poems that show the dark side of human nature. A wife and mother of two, Haley has a few surprises. She says that in addition to books, she collects bones, and sloths are her favorite animals.

Susan Kirsch: Susan is a dedicated student with a bright future. She values narrative greatly, and she has a knack for storytelling. In her essays, she strove to not only convey her main idea, but to give readers a full picture of people and situations in her essays. She is skilled at doing this in a way that is at the same time concise, descriptive, and beautiful. She was an active participant in class, skilled at reading between the lines and offering profound interpretations and analysis.

Abby Lowe: On the first day of class, Abby wrote about her shyness and dislike for speaking in class. At that early point, I worried that Abby would not thrive in the class but I was wrong. Over the course of the semester, Abby embraced the writing process and the process of becoming an involved and successful student. By the last essay, she was telling me what she had to revise in her draft – a mark of a student who has truly learned. Abby’s writing became more detailed and she began to cultivate her own voice. Her published essay entitled “Choices” speaks to Abby’s growth as a student and young woman as she acknowledges the importance of our daily choices and the responsibilities we all must assume. On the last day of class, I had no worries about Abby.

Darin McCracken: While returning to school may not have been Darin’s original intent, he has embraced the challenges and completed exemplary work. Often time Darin completed drafts far ahead of due dates to allow himself additional time for revision and deeper thinking. He truly comprehends the writing process.

Chuck Mosley: Chuck has faced adversity in his young life but in both his writing and actions he is not afraid to confront and conquer those obstacles with determination and style. In class, he was insightful and purposeful and I could count on him to elevate our discussions. In his writing, he was always determined to grapple with complex issues and events – both in his own life and in our culture as well. And he was consistently able to grab his reader’s attention with powerful dialogue, vivid language and insightful observations and conclusions. This is evident in both of his published pieces, “A Cry for Help” and “The Struggle,” where he powerfully recounts the struggles and successes he and his family faced while dealing with his mother’s addiction. In “The Struggle,” Chuck interviews his mother and the reader is able to truly understand her struggle with addiction and then cheers for her and her family when she finds the strength to overcome her addiction and embrace her family.

Mon’Tra Qualls-Woods has two essays published here. In his essay “Is School Really Worth the Effort,”

Mon'Tra points out problems in our educational system and then gives succinct suggestions for improving our system. He states his case clearly and convincingly with vivid examples from his own life as support for his argument. In "Growing Up with Reading," Mon'Tra recounts moving stories about the obstacles he faced in his quest to become a good reader and he likens his resolve to succeed to Frederick Douglass' resolve to learn to read and write.

Chrissy Reeves: Chrissy started English 100 already understanding that she'd need to work hard to achieve her goals. And that's what she did. Chrissy came to class every single day prepared and focused. Over the semester, she greatly improved as a critical thinker and writer. You can see her showcase these skills in her essay "My Literacy Autobiography." Chrissy is also a great question-asker, which causes her to see topics and readings in a unique way. Her inquisitive nature and work ethic will take her far.

Robert Scharfenberg in "The Villa Ridge Mansion" gives us a picturesque look at his childhood home, before and after, and then follows it with the life lessons he learned there. His engaging anecdotes about coming of age in a large family show how he learned these life lessons of hard work, responsibility, and "the art of diplomacy," and how these lessons have served him well as an adult in his career. Robert's fresh and expressive descriptions allow the reader to see, and his concise language lets the reader experience. I truly enjoyed this nostalgic piece.

Broderick Tate was a joy to have in class as his insights and perceptions were extremely well thought and well developed. When called upon, he was able to articulate his thoughts and set a standard for his classmates. His level of effort was exemplary and his essays a pleasure to read. I was delighted to learn that one of his essays was accepted for publication in the *Discovering the Student, Discovering the Self Publication*.

Viola Toma: Viola enriched our class start to finish with her intellectual curiosity and her rich, confident Sudanese accent. She credits that accent to her mother, whose voice she brings to life with such lines as "Her once velvety voice would turn shrill and sharp like an untuned violin: 'Tina. Gal, have you lost ya min'? Com' heya!" For Viola, our assignments were not merely hoops through which she must jump for grades; rather, she saw our assignments as opportunities to showcase the character and values of her loving family, sometimes solely featuring her family members, sometimes comparing her family with the families of other writers in our textbooks. Because of that, her writing gained the energy and heart that led it to being published.

Alexia "Lexi" Williams: Lexi was always the student whose "I-have-a-secret" expression dared a teacher to call on her. Her classmates and I soon discovered that Lexi's "secret" was her ability to write. When I'd place a page of her writing on the document camera for class critiques, no one need see her name to know whose voice rose distinctively from the page. Once her "secret" was out, Lexi emerged as a "go-to" student, always eager to share her work, I could tell, but also always waiting to be asked. It is a pleasure to know that now her voice will be shared with a larger audience.

Kenya Williams: Kenya entered class with passion and purpose and I was thrilled to see that passion and purpose reflected in her writing as well. She chose to write about people and issues that she felt deeply about. She wrote about a family member who overcame addiction and is now helping others in their own struggles and the importance of personal responsibility in our lives and society. In her published essay, "A Mother's Influence," Kenya espouses the importance of literacy and beautifully recalls her mother encouraging her to read and the valuable time they spent at the library. Kenya was a joy to have in class and I could always count on her to challenge her classmates and me.

