

Discovering the Student

Discovering the Self



Essays from ENG 100 Students

2016-17

English and Modern Languages Department

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 2016 semesters. 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.

English 100 Committee:

Dawn Terrick, Director of Developmental Writing

Dana Andrews

Cynthia Bartels

Stacia Bensyl

Patricia Brost

Brooksie Kluge

Joe Marmaud

Amy Miller

Leanne Murray

Beth Reinert

Kay Siebler



Director of Design and Layout:

Morgan Rathmann

Missouri Western State University

Department of English and Modern Languages

English 100 – Introduction to College Writing

2016-2017

Table of Contents

Anderson, Debra	
<i>How Reading Changed My Life</i>	4
<i>On The Move</i>	8
<i>Why Queer Isn't a Bad Word</i>	11
Anonymous	
<i>Michelle's House</i>	16
<i>Thoughts of Freedom</i>	18
Cogdill, Nora	
<i>The One and Only Shirley A. Milbourn</i>	20
Craig, Preston	
<i>365 Days a Year</i>	22
Frazier, Kelsey	
<i>Days That Repeat</i>	25
<i>Educated Deficiency</i>	27
Gouldsmith, Samuel	
<i>A Better Soldier and a Better Man</i>	29
<i>A Man on a Mission</i>	32
<i>The Strongest Stone May be a Book</i>	35
Jackson, Scott	
<i>Lessons From the Painful Moments in Life</i>	38
<i>The Struggle to Read</i>	40
<i>A Voice for The Voiceless</i>	42
Kibbe, Tori	
<i>Am I Foxy</i>	45
<i>Transgender Metamorphosis</i>	47
McKinley, Tessa	
<i>The Power of Reading & Writing</i>	50
Njoroge, Leah	
<i>Abel's Story</i>	53
O'Connor, Taylor	
<i>The Absurdity of Withheld Emotion</i>	55
<i>The Journey of a Million Thoughts</i>	57
<i>Who Do You Look Up To?</i>	59
Ramirez-Quevado, Au'sha	
<i>I Do It with a Purpose</i>	61
<i>It's Our Choice</i>	64
Reid, Cheyanne	
<i>Whale Watching Trip in Massachusetts</i>	68
Song, Bingxin	
<i>Be a Complete Person</i>	70
Thammarat, Chayata	
<i>He and I</i>	73
<i>A Place of My Mind</i>	77
About the Authors	80

How Reading Changed My Life

Debra L. Anderson

“Books are the plane, and the train, and the road. They are the destination and the journey.
They are home.”

Anna Quindlen

I tell people I am a college student, I am engaged, and I am 55 years old. Often I get a laugh and or in the case of another non-traditional female student, a high-five. What am I doing sitting in a college classroom with a bunch of kids who are younger than both of my children? It is not the first time I have sat in a college classroom. It has been 30 years since I last sat in a college classroom and this is my third attempt at completing my college degree. I grew up in the age before cable TV and the internet. If I wanted to learn about something I had to go to the library, we didn't have money to buy books. I loved libraries, not only because I loved to read, but because their quiet calm atmosphere and sense of order were reassuring when much of my world wasn't. I am not unique because of my struggles. My story is long, it is painful, but not without good things. I was reminded of this as I read each of the authors' stories. Reading changed their lives and for some, may have literally saved them. In “The Lonely, Good Company of Books” by Richard Rodriguez, “The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me” by Sherman Alexie, and “One Writer's Beginnings” by Eudora Welty I found pieces of their stories that fit into my life's puzzle. My parents and Rodriguez's parents were similar, Alexie's determination to break down doors to a better life are similar to mine, and as a parent I was like Welty's parents. Books became windows to worlds and possibilities that I would never have realized existed and when I became a parent I worked hard to inspire a love of reading in my children. Learning to love reading changed the lives of these three authors and changed not only my life, but those of my children.

Like Richard Rodriguez, I didn't learn to love books from my parents. Reading was something you learned in school. They grew up in a time and place where the value of even a high school degree didn't seem necessary. My father completed the eighth grade and my mother only sixth. Like Rodriguez's parents, “reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible. Never did I see either of them read an entire book” (Rodriguez 293). In fact, outside of a newspaper or owner's manual, I never saw either of my parents pick up a book until I was an adult. The reality of trying to keep a roof over our heads and food on the table didn't leave time for reading. My father's free time was usually spent drinking and my mother's “free” time meant falling asleep in the recliner while watching TV. For years she worked the overnight shift going to bed after she got us off to school in the morning and getting up by noon to take care of cleaning, laundry, shopping, and cooking. After supper she would take another three-hour nap before her 11:00pm – 7:00am shift. Not only did they not read for their own pleasure they never read to their children.

Unlike Rodriguez, reading drew me in from the beginning. Books were an escape from a chaotic, uncertain home, and friends when real friends were not to be found. We are also different because unlike Rodriguez, who initially felt reading was “impersonal” and isolating, to me books were inviting, a friend who took me on trips to places far from the small towns I lived in, introducing me to people and ideas that gave me hope for a different future. Over time Rodriguez began to love reading and like him I was, “at home in a fictional world where I knew the names of the characters and cared about what was going to happen to them” (Rodriguez 296). I wanted to be part of the Ingalls family or smart and pretty helping Nancy Drew solve the next mystery. I not only wanted to be somewhere else, I wanted to be someone else.

Both Rodriquez and I began to associate reading with being educated. Rodriquez went so far so to make lists of important books he should read and then write down the themes of the books. As he said, “I had the idea that they were crucial for my academic success, though I couldn’t have said exactly how or why” (Rodriquez 295). He thought that the value of a book was in finishing it and checking it off a list. I think because we both came from homes that didn’t see value in reading for its own sake it took time for that connection to be made and even longer to understand why. When I looked at the people I knew who were respected and looked up to, teachers and librarians, they read books. Rodriquez’s family didn’t understand what he saw in books, he would hear his “mother wondering” What do you see in your books?” (Was reading a hobby like her knitting? Was so much reading even healthy for a boy? Was it the sign of “brains”? Or was it just a convenient excuse for not helping around the house on those Saturday mornings?) Always, “What do you see . . . ?” (Rodriquez). I don’t think my family understood what I saw in all those books either, why they had to shake me because I didn’t hear them calling me from the kitchen that supper was on the table. I knew that books were special and that getting an education offered hope that someday I would no longer be standing outside, looking through a window, and watching other people live the lives I desperately wanted to be a part of.

In the Native American students that Sherman Alexie works with he sees a door that separates them from a better life, for me, it feels more like a window, but just as tough to break through. Alexie and his students had to battle stereotypes of what Native Americans could be, “As Indian children, we were expected to fail in the non-Indian world. Those who failed were ceremonially accepted by other Indians and appropriately pitied by non-Indians.” Alexie refused to fail and so he read anything he could get his hands on from books to cereal boxes to auto repair manuals. He kept banging against that door because as he said, “I was trying to save my life” (Alexie 14). Alexie knew he had to be his own Superman. I also read all the time. Weekends, breaks, and summers were spent reading. In those small libraries, when I ran out of different books I wanted to read I returned to old favorites. Alexie says he is lucky he made it out but he knows not everyone can make it without help so he spends time teaching at a reservation. There are students he has reached, “they look at me with bright eyes and arrogant wonder. They are trying to save their lives. Then there are the sullen and already defeated Indian kids who sit in the back rows and ignore me with theatrical precision” (Alexie 14). The bright-eyed students come into the classroom ready to learn, they are reading beyond what the classroom requires and writing. Alexie has shown them that a different future is possible and for those who embrace it, they have a chance to change their lives. The ones with the “empty notebooks” (Alexie 14) are the ones who still need a superman like Sherman Alexie to break down their door of fear and apathy.

Like Alexie, my family and for a long time most of my teachers didn’t have expectations of college for me. That expectation wasn’t because I didn’t have the ability but because I came from a poor family with an alcoholic father and uneducated parents who worked menial jobs. About his family Alexie said, “We lived on a combination of irregular paychecks, hope, fear, and government surplus food.” (Alexie 11). Expectations are usually low when you are poor no matter where you live. In my mind, an educated person was someone who had went to college and I thought it would be just a continuation of high school. Anything else I thought I knew about college came from books I had read or from what I saw on TV or in the movies and those portrayals were far from reality. The classmates I wanted to be like were going to college but I didn’t think college was an option because we were too poor. During my senior year, I found out that there were grants and loans to help pay college. This meant I could go to college. Now I thought I had the key I that would open the window and I would no longer be on the outside looking in.

I was wrong. That key wasn't enough. I failed not once but twice. Why did I fail is a question I have asked myself many times? It wasn't a lack of intelligence, things didn't come easily, but I maintained a B average. Making friends was easier because you start with a clean slate. No one knows anything about your family unless you share it with them. I worked really hard at looking like I belonged there. I went to my classes and did my homework. When you grow with an alcoholic you learn that appearance is important. If you can appear to the outside world that things are fine, then you don't have to admit they're not. Admitting there is a problem means you have to do something even if it is choosing to do nothing. At first, I was sure I was on my way to breaking the window that separated me from where I wanted to be. Over the course of my freshman year this vague feeling that something was missing began to hang over my shoulder and continued to grow during my sophomore year. The first time I took a break from college was the spring of my 3rd year. I would return the following fall and when I was offered an internship in St. Paul that spring I took it. On the outside I still looked like I was doing fine. When the internship was over I simply never moved back. I was really close to finishing but felt like I didn't belong there and I would never actually get my degree. For 25 years I lived 13 miles from SMSU and didn't do anything about finishing my degree. So, why am I finally trying to finish my degree? First it is now financially feasible. I have someone who has encouraged me to do this and is supporting me in any way he can. Secondly I am different. I can admit I don't always know what I am going and ask for help. I sometimes still feel like I am banging against that window but it has some pretty big cracks in it and with some help from the Robins in my life, I can be my own Superman and shatter that window.

Parents are the best role models and facilitators in creating a love of reading in their children and like Eudora Welty's parents, I was determined to be that kind of parent. I hoped, unlike me, my children would be able to break through the window. Welty's mother read to her all the time and in many different rooms of their house. Her mother read to her in the morning while sitting in a rocking chair in the bedroom and in the "dining room on winter afternoons in front of the coal fire, with our cuckoo clock ending the story with 'Cuckoo,' and at night when I'd got in my own bed" (Welty 298). Our house, like Welty's, had books everywhere. There was a bookcase in the playroom and in each of my children's bedrooms. When they were infants, I sat in the worn gold rocker with them on my lap and "read" to them the brightly colored plastic books, cloth books with textures, and then the hard cardboard ones. We read *Chicka Chicka Boom Boom* so often all three of us had it memorized. I read them the the Robert Munsch books, including *I'll Love You Forever* and the Little House books, and books about dinosaurs and big machines. I read to them every day until they could read by themselves and then I would lay on their beds with them and they would read to me. Like Welty's parents, I wanted my children to feel that books were communal, something to be shared with the people around them. When Welty wrote about her parents giving her books, "I was presented, from as early as I can remember, with books of my own, which appeared on my birthday and Christmas morning" (Welty 301). I was that parent. When my children brought home the Scholastic book orders I would sit down at the kitchen table with them and we would pick out the books they wanted. Books were always included in their presents at Christmas, Easter, and their birthdays. I didn't forget about the library which had been such an important place for me. In the summer and sometimes on a nice winter day we would walk the few blocks to the small library downtown. Both of my children grew to love reading the same way that I did. When my son and daughter were older and had money of their own it wasn't unusual for them to buy a book. As adults, my children have continued to be readers, but instead of giving them actual books I often give them a gift card to a bookstore. Books are a bond

between us, a part of our shared memories that bring to mind a cozy warm feeling and sometimes laughter, that can never be broken.

Books provided me with a safe place to escape to and were friends when I didn't have them. They showed me there was a world beyond what I knew and gave me hope for a better future. Without them, I'm not sure if I would have ever thought there was more to life or even went to college at all. I know that I have more and have been to places my parents never even dreamed about because of my love of reading. I am proud to say that both of my children have post-secondary degrees. My daughter has a Bachelor's degree in Social Studies and my son has a two-year degree in HVAC and Plumbing. Richard Rodriguez, Sherman Alexie, and Eudora Welty became who they were because they read. It was their love of reading that began their journey to becoming writers. No matter who you are or how much money you have books can open doors in your mind and plant seeds that can grow and make not only your world better but your children's and the world around you.

Alexie, Sherman. "Superman and Me." *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Wardle. New York: Bedford St Martin's: 2014. 11-14.

Rodriguez, Richard. "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." *Introduction to College Writing*. Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2010: 293-297. Print.

Welty, Eudora. "One Writer's Beginning." *Introduction to College Writing*. Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2008: 298-303.

On The Move

Debra L. Anderson

“The more that you read, the more things you will know.
The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.”
I Can Read With My Eyes Shut!

Dr. Seuss

I grew up in a family with parents who hadn't completed more than the 6th and 8th grades. We didn't have money for vacations and didn't spend any real-time with grandparents or cousins. We moved often, either to a new place in the same town or down the road to another small town. At one point my younger brother and I attended five different schools in two years. The one constant for me was school and more importantly, the library and the escape books gave me. Whether it was a school library, a public library, or a bookmobile, a library always felt like a safe place when things were chaotic and unpredictable at home.

Early on I found that libraries, with their quiet calm atmosphere and sense of order, were reassuring. My earliest memory of a library was in the Clarkfield elementary school. Once a week we walked single file down the long hallway to the library. It had, what seemed, shelves and shelves of books all the way to the ceiling. The librarian's large wooden desk sat in front of a cinder block wall with windows that overlooked the playground. Heavy dark drapes hung on both sides of the windows and would be closed on hot days in the fall and spring. In one corner was a two-tiered metal cart on wheels with the reel to reel movie projector. Lined up in neat rows were little rectangular tables with tan tops and with appropriately sized brightly colored chairs of red, blue, yellow, and green. I loved the sounds of pages turning, hushed voices, and of feet hurrying across the carpet to find the right book before it was time to go. There were the giggles of the girls at another table and the librarians shush when they were too loud. We could only check out three books. Once we had found our treasures we stood in line to check them out with the librarian. We would remove the little card from the pocket inside the back cover and neatly print our first and last names with a little pencil. The librarian would then stamp the due date on the slip inside the book and on the card with our name. I would take the books home and read them over and over until the following week when I could check out three more.

In the fourth grade, Mrs. Stanford read out loud to us after recess. She would read a chapter or maybe two if they were short. She was the one who introduced me to Laura Ingalls Wilder when she read *Farmer Boy* to us. As we settled down there were desks opening and closing and paper rattling by those who wanted to draw while she read. This was my favorite part of the day. I usually preferred to put my head down on my desk, close my eyes, and just listen. I didn't have to wonder if any of my classmates knew my secrets like how much my parents fought or that my Dad was drunk a lot.

The move to Echo in October of fifth grade was the first in a series of moves that would leave me isolated, and looking back, depressed. Before this, I had been a pretty good student, shy and self-conscious, but I always had at least one friend. At first, everyone is your friend when you are the new kid. When they realize you are shy and poor the novelty wears off pretty quickly. During this time money was more of an issue than usual for our family so second-hand clothes and free lunches at school became the norm. My classmates were now old enough to notice these things and in a small town everyone knows everyone else's business, so my family's situation was always common knowledge. Eating alone or having someone be nice to you so they could find a way to embarrass you were common.

The calm atmosphere of the library and its books became even more of an escape during this time. The school buildings in these towns were old and their libraries reflected that. When entering you were greeted by high ceilings, dark wood shelves, windows that looked dirty, and that musty smell that comes from old books and magazines unused for too many years. None of that mattered to me. What mattered was that it was ok to sit quietly by yourself because it didn't make you different or stand out. What mattered was that there were Nancy Drew Mysteries that I hadn't read many times for me to escape to when my dad was on a drunken rant, blaming his wife and four children for all of his problems.

As I moved through elementary school the school library was the one place I felt comfortable and safe. When everything else was scary and uncertain I could count on the library to have books that felt like home (Nancy Drew, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Judy Blume) and new ones that could take me to new places and become new friends. In most of these small rural towns that I lived in, with their Mom & Pop grocery stores that carried milk and bread and cans of soup or boxes of cereal that looked like their expiration dates were long past, public libraries were already a thing of the past or had never been. Bookmobiles filled that void for many in these towns. Young mothers with preschool children and the old were their patrons and in the summer I joined them on the sidewalk waiting for these small RVs with books lining their walls to arrive and open their doors to the library on wheels. In the summer when my classmates were hanging out with their friends I was hanging out with mine: Nancy, Laura, and Judy.

In the spring of my sixth-grade year, we moved to a new town for the last time. Five towns in two years were enough for my mother; if my father wanted to move again he would do so alone. I felt a sense of relief. Marshall, population 10,000, was the biggest town I had ever lived in and the public library, oh the library. The building was new with large clean windows, bright lights, and a separate children/teen section on the second floor. I was there often, especially in the summer, retreating to its calm quiet atmosphere as a break from the continuing tensions at home. Some things were better. Money was less of an issue and I had found a friend who loved reading almost as much as I did. I was doing better in school again thanks, in part, to a teacher who encouraged me to come out of my shell. But the library would continue to be an important part of my life. By the time I was a freshman I noticed a couple of girls from high school putting away books and helping to check them out. Up until then, I had never imagined, that as a student, I could get paid to work in the library, surrounded by books and other people who loved them. The summer before my junior year I worked up enough courage to apply for a part-time job at the library.

For the next four years, my job at the library would provide a sense of community that had been lacking in my life. I developed some confidence in myself as I learned how to interact with people I didn't know by talking to the people who visited the library regularly. There is a connection that happens between strangers who share a love of something. It makes it easier for strangers to become friends. The women who worked there would become my aunts and big sisters, they were the ones I shared my ups and downs with. It was their advice I sought out on issues with school, friends, and boys. When my first boyfriend broke my heart it was Linda's shoulder that I cried on. In time I would share the secrets of my home life with them. I began to see that it wasn't necessary to hide my home life from everyone. While libraries had always provided a sense of calm and escape for me, the four years I worked at the Marshall-Lyon County Library helped me to start to overcome my shyness and feel less isolated and more confident.

As I moved from grade to grade and town to town and went from reading the *Little House on the Prairie* series, Nancy Drew mysteries, and I'm embarrassed to say, Harlequin Romance novels the library and its books provided an escape from living in a dysfunctional home with an

alcoholic father and a mother, who grew up with an abusive alcohol father, struggling to do better for her children. Over time the library would provide a sense of community and family that I had only experienced from the outside looking in. I began to understand that being shy didn't mean you didn't need interactions with real people. As Winnie the Pooh said, "You can't stay in your corner of the forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes." The people skills I began to develop while working there would help me develop the confidence to reach out to others, in particular, those who I sensed were struggling as I had. Even after all these years later when I walk into a library a sense of calm and security comes over me and it feels a little bit like home.



Why Queer Isn't a Bad Word

Debra L. Anderson

When your children are born you have all of these hopes and dreams for them. You want them to be healthy and grew up to be happy successful adults. I think most parents also want them to have it easier than they did. While you know there will be challenges for your children you hope they will be the typical challenges that will help them grow and become stronger. What you don't hope for is them being the target of misconceptions, discrimination, hatred, and even violence because of who they are. When your child is bi-sexual their road to becoming happy, healthy, successful adults is longer and paved with challenges that most people will never experience. My daughter Brittany is bisexual. What that means is she is attracted to both men and women. I have known that she is bi-sexual for few years and she shares the details of her life with me on a regular basis but we have never sat down and talked about her journey to self-acceptance and its challenges from the beginning. I wanted to interview her to help others understand the challenges members of the L.G.B.T. community face, dispel some misconceptions by making it more personal through her story, and help others who may be on this journey.

When you are L.G.B.T. (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender) coming to terms with one's sexuality when you are surrounded by people who basically look and sound alike and whose values and beliefs are based on the Judeo-Christian heritage is a confusing and painful process. We lived in a town in southwestern Minnesota, population 1,300. Cottonwood was a conservative rural community. It was a single parent household that included me (her mom), Brittany, and her younger brother Dalton. While their father wasn't around much they had extended family in the area including grandparents with whom they spent time on a regular basis. According to Brittany, this was a good place to grow up in, "The whole fabric of the community was knit together, whether it was school activities or church activities, or whatever town stuff was going on! Yah, everyone was everywhere." Despite all these great things about growing up in a small town, the truth was, if she had come out while still in school many of these caring supportive people would have shunned her or worse.

Puberty is always a difficult time, but for someone who is also grappling with their sexual identity, there is another layer of confusion. Brittany's first sense that she might be different was in the sixth grade. She had a dream about kissing a girl and it "freaked" her out. Certain situations began to make her feel self-conscious, like the girl's locker room. Her friendships with other girls were often intense. Growing up Brittany had a close group of friends who, "when we were watching movies and stuff always wanted to cuddle and they would all pile together on the couch and I always felt weird about that. I would never join them, um, or at sleepovers, if everybody piled on the bed I would choose to sleep on the floor." There wasn't one incident telling her she was different, but rather a gradual increase in discomfort as she moved from junior high to high school.

At barely 18, Brittany headed off to college in New York City but that didn't mean she suddenly could put a name to her feelings. During her freshman year, many of her new friends were gay men. There was this saying "gay by May" to convey the process of coming out for many of the gay men at college. They would come to college identifying as straight but would gradually identify as bi-sexual and finally by the end of the year openly gay. According to these "experts" bi-sexuality wasn't real, but a step before admitting to being gay. This added to her confusion about her attraction to both men and women.

The first time someone opens up about their sexuality, it usually isn't a full blown coming out. In Brittany's case, during the fall of her sophomore year, she shared with a straight friend at

college that she thought she had a crush on a co-worker named Belinda. She chose Kate, who was part of the circle of friends that included gay men, but that didn't remove the anxiety or confusion. For Brittany, it was the "first time I expressed out loud, um, that, that it was a possibility. I wouldn't say that it was me coming out necessarily but it was like testing the waters, for sure." At this point, she hadn't identified herself as either a lesbian or bi-sexual and it would be about two more years before she would make that leap.

The decision to come out isn't the end of the journey to self-acceptance but merely a big step forward, and for Brittany, it would be a gradual process over several years. She had become friends with Aaron, who was gay and like a big brother to her. She was in an on-again-off-again relationship with a woman and struggling with uncertainty and fear. As Brittany said, "I wasn't identifying as anything." but just trying to figure out what it meant to be bi-sexual because her images of what it meant to be bi-sexual were from awful reality shows and she kept thinking "that's not me." Telling Aaron was the first time she had said to another person that she was bi-sexual and as she said with a hesitant laugh, "saying the words, like, I'm bi-sexual, it was so hard but was such a relief." The door was now open to having an actual open relationship with a woman, at least in New York City.

Brittany's first serious relationship with a woman would be the push for her to tell me that she was bi-sexual. We are close and she said it felt weird to keep that part of her life from me. Brittany told me when she was back home for a friend's wedding. We were in the car and while I don't remember her exact words, it took me a few seconds to comprehend what she had just said. For her it was a "big step in my identity shifting", but for me it was heartbreaking. All I could think was if only I had known when she was a teenager I could have been there for her. When she was confused and struggling I could have put my arms around her, told her I loved her, and that she was perfect just as she was. As her mother, I still get emotional thinking about how confused and scared she must have been and that she had faced that alone.

First loves are always intense and exciting and Brittany's was no different. While there had been a couple of other relationships with men and women this was the first one that was serious. Brittany met Cindy during training for residence hall staff. Describing it, Brittany said, "I fell madly in love, um, and it was just, it was great. It was really great. I mean it was like a hard relationship, but it was really exciting to fall for someone and have it feel, just like, that natural." While Brittany had come out to me and had introduced Cindy to me via Skype, Cindy was adamant that she couldn't tell her family because of their extreme homophobia. She would be disowned and lose her financial support. This left Brittany feeling like Cindy was "ashamed" of her. The strain would play a major part in their break up.

When you're living in the melting pot of New York City you would expect there to be less open harassment and hostility towards members of the L.G.B.T. community, but Brittany and Cindy discovered this to be far from true. One day they were walking down the street holding hands and a homeless man sitting in front of a Starbucks started chasing them, screaming that he was going to rape them. On another occasion a man started following them, getting right behind them and began describing very graphically what sexual acts he wanted to do to them. The worst incident may have been when they were riding on the subway, chatting about their day, when a man got on and came and stood over them and started simulating masturbating and grunting. The subway was crowded so there wasn't anywhere for them to move to. They were scared, but tried to ignore it and relieved when he got off at the next stop. Not once did anyone try to stop these people from harassing them or even ask them if they were all right when the incidents were over. Adding to Brittany's general sense of fear and anxiety were a couple of incidents of gay men being shot and the murder of a transsexual woman in New York City. These incidents combined with

something happening back in Minnesota would push Brittany to come out sooner than she probably would have.

In May of 2013, there was a bill in the Minnesota Legislature legalizing gay marriage. Chris Swedzinski, the representative from Southwestern Minnesota, was interviewed by the local newspaper on the amendment. His response began Brittany's short journey to needing to share her sexual orientation with her grandparents and other family members. Brittany and Cindy had begun to talk about getting married someday. Brittany had been following the progress of the gay marriage amendment back home in Minnesota. The measure was going to pass, but Chris Swedzinski said he would be voting no because being gay was sinful and gay marriage was not part of the family values of his constituents. This hurt because he was a person of authority, an elected official, and he was saying she wasn't welcome in his district. She said "I didn't choose this," and "one of the reasons I think I ultimately needed to get out of there was the feeling that I would be burned at the stake," she said with nervous laughter. To deal with her feelings she wrote a letter explaining how hurtful and destructive his statements were not only to her but to L.G.B.T. individuals living in his district. She sent it to friends, including Rayne, who was interning at the Huffington Post. She hadn't intended for it to be published but he responded almost immediately asking if they could publish it in their on-line edition. With the vote coming up in the next day or two, they wanted to do so right away. He gave her a couple of hours to make a decision. She knew if she said yes that would mean coming out to everyone in a very public way. With her brother and I no longer living in Cottonwood it felt safer to open up about this. It also meant that she could no longer put off telling her father and grandparents if she didn't want them to find out from someone else.

Coming out to her dad and his family was one of the hardest parts of the journey for Brittany. When she had come out to me, her brother, and my side of the family she found mostly acceptance. She did find at least verbal acceptance from her father and her stepmother. The big question was how would her paternal grandparents react? They were conservative Christian farmers who had lived in southwestern Minnesota their whole lives. Brittany was their first grandchild and they put her on a "pedestal." In their world homosexuality was a sin. Her decision to allow the Huffington Post to publish her letter meant the phone call had to be made. Their reaction would be what she expected but not what she hoped for.

The phone call to Grandma Anderson was "by far the scariest thing I've ever done," she said. Brittany had hoped they would be proud of her. She tried to explain that she was coming out in hopes of helping others and how when others shared their stories it helped her feel less alone. She had hoped the conversation would end on a semi-positive note but that would not be the case, instead, it ended with her grandmother expressing she was disappointed in Brittany. When Brittany hung up she wasn't sure if she would ever talk to her grandparents again. That night was also a big gala event and Brittany was the senior senator for Hunter College. There she was, sitting on a balcony on the Upper East Side overlooking Central Park, in a beautiful dress, crying her eyes out while friends held her. She thought to herself, "after everything I had accomplished for her to be disappointed. I hadn't killed anyone." Her grandmother called her a couple of weeks later to say Brittany was still her granddaughter and she loved her. Since then there has been a lot of progress, but the relationship has never been quite the same.

Being bi-sexual creates its own set of dating challenges that, like me, most people probably have never considered. Some members of the L.G.B.T. community don't think bisexuality is real. According to Brittany, they think you are either confused or not ready to admit you are gay/lesbian. Women initially think you are a lesbian and then they start to worry you will leave them for a man. Straight men may initially think it's "hot" but then start to worry you will leave

them for a woman. Also, most people assume she is straight even when, as she says, “My hair was really short and I had the most cliché’ queer girl haircut.” This even happens in gay bars. Some people assume they have a larger pool to pick from but both straight and homosexuals are uncomfortable with having to compete with additional individuals when dating someone who is bisexual.

Professionally there have been some unique challenges for her as well. Brittany works for a labor union so her co-workers and other members of the community tend to be progressive and it is politically acceptable in those circles. While she hasn’t had to hide her sexual orientation there has been some resentment among the older “queers”. They couldn’t come out when they were her age for fear of hurting their careers or they did come out and suffered for it. It has also meant more work because as she says, “In a moment when suddenly like it’s much more politically acceptable you get tokenized. I get tokenized a lot and I’ve used it to my advantage, but it’s also really frustrating that I’m the token queer person who has to go to this and that, and represent, you know, it ends up being like more work for me because I’m the queer one.” It also feels weird to have the people she interacts with on a professional level know her sexuality. Brittany has found ways to use this to her advantage and that has opened doors for her professionally.

I asked my daughter what advice would she give to those struggling with their sexuality or whether to come out. She said, “Be patient with yourself. Love yourself.” According to Brittany, there has been so much progress in the last 5 years that it is already a different ball game and not just politically. It is less acceptable to be homophobic and technology, like blogs and Tumbler, has made it easier to connect and find a sense of community, even if it isn’t in person. Feeling isolated and alone can be one of the biggest challenges for members of the L.G.B.T. community so having a support system is crucial to finding their way in the world.

I also asked her what advice would she give to family and friends and she again said “be patient” and also “don’t make assumptions.” Her grandmother is a good example of this. Over time she has begun to ask questions about things she wonders about or doesn’t understand. She worried that she would say something wrong or ask a dumb question. Brittany has reassured her that she wants her to ask those questions. It is better to put yourself out there, by showing your vulnerability, it will make it easier for the L.G.B.T. person to open up to you.

My final question for my daughter was “What one thing would you want other people to know about you that would surprise them?” Brittany replied so softly I had to ask her to repeat what she said, “I am full of surprises.” She then continued that she finds it funny that I won’t call her queer. She understands for me it has negative connotations and that for most of my life terms like queer and fag were used in a derogatory way. Brittany explained that the term “bi-sexual” still feels ‘icky” but she doesn’t feel that way about the word queer. “Queer feels empowering.” I realized I could hear the difference in her voice when she said each word. This was a surprise to me and I will have to work on it.

Since Brittany went off to New York City eight years ago I have watched her become this strong and fierce young woman. She puts herself out there all the time. When she was displaced by Hurricane Sandy and taken in by a friend’s family she was so grateful for their generosity that she volunteered at a shelter for displaced disabled adults. After Ferguson, she became involved in the Black Lives Matter protests and before that she was involved in the Occupy Wall Street movement in New York City. When the shooting in the gay nightclub in Orlando happened it was a terrifying reminder that there are individuals out there that hate my daughter so much they are willing to shoot them like fish in a rain barrel. Shaken but not defeated, she continues to work for equality and justice for those whose voices are often forgotten.

It is still hard sometimes to have Brittany live so far away. She has overcome so much, but sometimes still struggles with navigating the world she lives in. I am so proud of who she has become and how brave she is in the face of discrimination, hostility and sometimes just ignorance. More than once she has called and said she is ready to give up and leave New York City. She has booked last minute flights to come home where there is fresh air, open spaces, and quiet. Being surrounded by people who love her, she is rejuvenated and returns to New York to “fight the good fight.” I believe what most parents want, to paraphrase Martin Luther King Jr., is for the day when their child will be judged by who they are and what they have accomplished not by a label that the world has stuck on them.

Anderson, Brittany. Personal interview. 1 October 2016.

Michelle's House

Anonymous

I was approximately 30 years of age before I met my dearest bosom friend. At first glance Michele seemed as though she was very shy. Every single time she spoke to me, she would shake a little bit. However, this became one of my favorite quirks about her. I met her when I purchased a "fixer upper" next door to her. The stress of being a single and very strict mother, was hard enough. But, when I threw my children and I in a construction zone, it was proving to be slowly traumatic. I was so scared because I did not have family or friends in the area for support. We literally had nowhere to escape, so without the comforts of Michelle and her house my family and I would have gone insane.

I have always been a strict mother. No shoes in the house, no eating in bedrooms, no electronics before homework and chores. This was a seemingly impossible task to keep my rules in order with a "fixer upper." The dirty, dusty grime that comes with a fixer upper reminds me of a Dexter scene. All the plastic he tapes off a room with, right before he plays into his mental masterpiece of murder felt just like my home. Every time I glanced at the floor to ceiling plastic I would receive a chill. Almost everyday I thought I was in over my head and just needed a moment away from this house.

After a few months of living next door to Michelle she asked me small questions and her husband Mike would tell me everyday, "Hey, come inside and smoke, get out of the cold". The first night my family and I all ended up next door, we stayed until midnight. Mike had just told me to come inside when I was almost in tears with my house. Marching across the frozen grass I listened to the crunch of it, wishing every second it was Captain Crunch cereal instead of the frozen ground. Upon my entrance to her wonderful abode, Michelle greeted me at the door with a Cheshire cat smile and the words that still ring in my ears to this day, "Bosom friend, you need never knock again." All the trumpets played in my head when entering her home. Her house was so clean and crisp, my eyes were blinded by the light bouncing of the white walls. The smell of snickerdoodle cookies burnt over in a small scentsy pot in the corner, where she had clearly claimed as her spot on the couch. It was just like my old apartment, before this fixer upper next door.

An hour after my arrival to this beautiful home, I overheard her husband complaining about her not being able to make Mexican food. Well, it was on when he spoke those words. For I am a California native and that's what we do. Between our houses we had all the ingredients for enchiladas, my families favorite dish. My bosom friend and I sent Mike and a couple of the smaller children to the store for tortilla chips and some Mexican beer. I started all the ingredients for enchiladas on the stove. I showed Michelle how easy it was to prepare and slow cook all the beef and tortillas. I ran home to fetch my homemade salsa and to print off some plexus mind puzzle games. I sure loved plexus puzzles. I just had no one to do them with. My children were so good at them they just read them like anything else. I had high hopes that my new bosom friend would enjoy the possibility of something new that we might grow to share in common.

I carefully showed her how to prepare the rest of my family's favorite dish. Take your cooked tortilla, put two tablespoons of beef inside, sprinkle that with cheese, and then you wrap it up, put two tablespoons of enchilada sauce on top, and sprinkle that with cheese. After the first one was made she jumped right in and finished up. We placed it in the oven together. "G," she said, "Thank you so much, this means the world to me." Before I even finished, "You're welcome", she interrupted, "Are those "plexus?" "Well yes they are indeed plexus, dear bosom friend." She loved

plexus puzzles as much if not more than I did. I could not stop smiling. Our families had so much in common it was uncanny.

Mike roared upon entering with "MMMMMMmmmm, what smells so good." Everyone in the entire house began laughing. I spoke first, "Your beautiful wife has made enchiladas! It is my family's favorite dish." "You mean you made it?" "No," I replied I showed her how and she took over like it was natural, you have a grade a chief on your hands. "ENCHILADAS!" I made enchiladas," Michele blurted out loud. At that moment you could see Mike falling in love with his quirky wife again. Mike chuckled a bit and said, "Welcome to your home away from home."

"Plexus," Mike yells. "You are going to scare G away with all those crazy little word puzzle boxes. You are the only one who really gets them Michelle." "I brought them from home along with homemade salsa." Mike looked back and forth between Michelle and I for quite a long time. "Gwen, Mexican food, plexus puzzles. Where have you been our whole lives?"

Enchiladas were out of the oven and it was like a Mexican Holiday barbecue in the house at this point. Kids were running around with toy guns made from sticks and shoes. Our warm laughter was so loud the windows felt the vibration of the warm air molecules that exited our mouths. We set the table to begin to enjoy our feast. Mike stopped us and said, "This is an occasion that calls for the fine China." When he arrived from the garage with a medium sized box of the brightest colored dishes, everyone in the house lost it with laughter again. Everyone from both families grabbed dishes and just started washing the dishes. Children happily doing chores was an amazing sight. I had never been to a Holiday family dinner that was this heart warming. The pure happiness on everyone's face was extraordinary. All the children sat with napkins on their laps while Michelle dishes out enchilada after enchilada. We all talked about how good the food was, how much we had in common and how close we were in age. Michelle and I could not help ourselves and before dinner was over, we began to talk about our love of plexus. Mike and the children weighed in, giving us plexus of their own. From the very first night upon entering my very best bosom friend's house, our families have never loved another family quite like the one we call family. Michelle is now considered my sister and Mike is my brother in law. Our children refer to each other as siblings, not just friends and old neighbors.

All of us at that point in our lives needed family and support. Michelle's family needed a close relationship with people at that point in their lives. Michelle's family, just like my family, had no family in the area for comfort and support. Without the comfort, friendship and what became family of Michelle and her home, Michelle herself would have went insane. I don't think I would have been able to finish my "fixer upper" without Michelle and her home. She and I are still the best bosom friend. We really do consider each other sisters from the close bond we shared from being there for each other during stressful and good times.

Thoughts of Freedom

Anonymous

The Introduction to College Writing textbook has been sitting in my home for a little over a year waiting to be opened and used. I was too scared and too embarrassed, as old as I am to enroll in an English class. I brushed through this book very quickly before entering my first full English class of my entire life. I was raised in the northern California region of America in the twentieth century in a strict religious compound. In my family's religion women do not have the same rights as the majority of the rest of the Western women do. Although, hundreds of thousands of women in America still belong to my families religion, I personally could not be cut off to the possibilities of what-if. I was not able to attend public school very often, when I did I was made fun of so much that I despised school anyway. My entire world was literally a fifty acre compound in northern California. When I was reading, "How I Learned to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass, Douglass came to a realization when his master was talking to his mistress in front of him about how cruel it would be to teach a slave to read and write. His master said, "There would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm." (Douglass 270). I understood these words all too well, you see, I was never taught about life or any existence outside of my fifty acre world or my families religion. Pondering the Earth as a spherical globe of gas and dust floating through the ether of space and time inside the supervoid of the filament known to humans as life was something I found in a dumpster, in a science book, well past the first decade of my life. As my imagination grew with every new picture, from every new page, I understood why every person that bossed me around at that point in my life also told me to stop reading all those words, it would do me no good and that I could become unmanageable one day. Like Douglass the form of my freedom came to me by acknowledging an entire world outside the walls of my compound and similarly to Douglass thoughts of my freedom to learn and read like the rest of America was doing in the twentieth century helped me overcome the compounded learning restrictions of my family's religious beliefs.

It was against my religion to attend public school and to be open to the millions of possibilities other than what it said in our bible. For the most part I am still shunned from a majority of my family. Not talking to my family has been the hardest part of my literacy journey. Douglass puts his learning very well by saying, "I set out with high hope, and a fixed purpose, at whatever cost of trouble, to learn how to read." (Douglass 271). "At whatever cost," is something that Douglass, a slave in the eighteenth century, meant a lashing or sometimes even death. It is something I had to deal with myself. That for me meant, if I was caught reading or asking about a subject, not intended for me I would receive a very good whooping. When the whooping didn't work I was given no food. The pain from a whooping did not last very long and I was a very petite child to begin with so only one meal a day had virtually no effect on me. My punishments never bothered me, they did not keep me up at night. What bothered me and kept me up was my thoughts of the endless possibilities that were outside in the world.

All of my Elders, family and friends tried convincing me to stop looking outside of their own beliefs and their own comfort zones. In doing this one of my teachers at church asked me, "Don't you want to go to Utah and get baptized amongst all of us?" I didn't understand what a "utah" was before my teacher asked. In all of my teachings as a child I was barely able to read at the age of ten let alone write. I had no television and the radio was considered the Devil's song. I had no means of knowledge in my religious compound. Douglass also experienced his mistress

treating him poorly. Because, of her teaching him to read he say's, "Under its influence, the tender heart became stone." (Douglass 272). This was Douglass's mistress's attitude after she, a kind woman, became bitter at his intelligence had started to become a burden. Douglass was caught reading a newspaper, his mistress became even more bitter towards him, she forbid him to learn. It was quite dangerous to have an educated slave, for they could become unmanageable and it would forever unfit them. Douglass had too ultimately teach himself in secret how to read and write. My own teacher instantly regretted mentioning, "Utah," she struck my hand with a paddle within seconds of me asking, "What is a utah?" I found out what Utah was in a week. It was a state, I then had to find out what a state was.

I had so many thoughts on how I would learn of what a state was. My family's compound was about a thirty minute walk from a public school. Several years previously my siblings and I were placed in foster care and had to by law attend public school. I remember being asked to write the alphabet. When I did not write (what I now know is not the correct English alphabet) my teacher crumbled my paper and tossed it into a small black plastic bin. I was taunted by the other children in class and in school for not knowing what the alphabet was at almost ten years of age. I began to hide instead of going to class. That is when I noted, another teacher toss all the contents of another small black plastic bin, into a large green metal container. I thought to myself, "I will find what a state is in that large green metal container." Douglass began his journey with reading and writing as he said, "The ideah as to how I might learn to write was suggested to me by being in Durgin and Bailey's shipyard." (Douglass 275). Like Douglass and the shipyard that held all the letters on small boards that held his first writing lessons, he says, "When a piece of timber was intended for the larboard side, it would be marked thus-"L." I found an abundance of crumpled up notes in a large green metal container and then finally books of Western teachings, my first Western book was a science book.

I myself still have a long road to the possibilities of the universe. I have been so scared and so very slow paced on my literacy and knowledge journey of Western teachings, that two decades have passed before I built up enough courage to attend college. Douglass also had a very long journey to finally become the man that I only know of today and that has ultimately helped me in overcoming any predispositioned fear that I might have once had. In his short autobiography that let me too read his wonderful literacy journey of how he personally learned to read and write, it was said about him, "He became a prominent abolitionist, women's rights leader, and public speaker. Douglass was also an advisor to Abraham Lincoln and a publisher of the newspaper *The North Star*." Douglass a slave became such a wonderful man in his life once born into slavery. He became a "women's right leader," that to me was something I was all too familiar with. You see, women are considered second class citizens in my family's religion, I had no right to read, write and learn as I pleased. I have always and only thought of the stars above at night where do they come from and why are they there. I will be taking a path in to Physics and what the universe holds for me is still thousands of possibilities.

In the essay "How I Learned to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass, Douglass gave me the courage to tell my story of my own literacy freedom of my past that I have tried to hide from for many years. Women in my family's religion are treated like second class citizens still to this day. They do not talk back even as adults, it is strictly forbidden. They are told whom to marry, how many children to have, what to eat and how much, they are told what to read, what to write, what to learn and ultimately what to do with the thoughts of their own selves.

Douglass, Frederick. "How I Learned to Read and Write." Introduction to College Writing. Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. 2010: 270-276. Print

The One and Only Shirley A. Milbourn

Nora Cogdill

Sometimes it's the people that we trust the most in our lives that are the first ones to deceive and hurt us. Most of us generally trust those that we've been around for a long period of time and why wouldn't we, as long as they have never given us any reason not to. We like to believe that those we spend time with are telling us the truth. However, that may not always be the case. No matter how long you have known someone, you should always question their motives and their stories. Not everyone is who they appear to be.

I met Shirley Milbourn on May 4, 1999. It was a bright, beautiful, warm, sunny day. It was my first day on the job at the St. Jo Frontier Casino. She was a fifty-nine-year-old Security Guard and I was a 19-year-old Guest Service Representative. I was just a kid entering the adult world and Shirley took me under her wing and showed me the ropes. My first image of her was very vivid. She was five foot six inches tall, very round and had a turkey neck. Have you ever noticed that extra skin under a turkey's neck? Shirley had it. Her hair resembled that of a poodle, white and gray with super tight curls. Her round glasses sat on the end of her nose, which made her gray, squinty eyes stand out even more. She reminded me of an old librarian that was scolding you for being too loud in the library. She was wearing her work uniform which consisted of black work pants and a white shirt, however she also wore a black puffy sleeveless vest. The vest wasn't uniform standard but she always said, "I like to stand out", which she had no problem doing. When she walked, there was a skip in her step, as if she was carefree with no place in the world to be. Several people thought she was mean, because she would tell you exactly what she thought of you, not caring if she hurt your feelings. I thought she was entertaining and enjoyed being around her.

I worked with Shirley eight hours a day, five days a week, so we became very close pretty quickly. We'd spend hours just talking about work and life. She enjoyed talking, especially when it came to her grandson Michael Jr., whom she was raising. I asked her several times about the boy's mother and she always had negative things to say about her. She would say things such as, "She walked out on him when he was a baby", and "She was nothing but an alcoholic and druggy." She would also say that she would call from time to time just to ask for money. She truly disliked her. That should have been a sign, but who was I to judge someone? I thought it was awesome that Shirley helped her son Michael raise him. There was nothing she wouldn't do for him. She worked extra hours just to help pay for school trips, she'd take him on elaborate vacations, such as Disney World and the Grand Canyon. She was the picture of an ideal grandma.

Shirley also taught me a great work ethic. She use to always say, "If you aren't at least fifteen minutes early, then you are already late.", which to this day I still arrive early everywhere I go. She was always very reliable and never called in to work. She'd say, "Can't pay the bills if you're not here to earn the money." That's why when she didn't show up to work one morning, we all were concerned. Several of us attempted to contact her numerous times; I even stopped by her house on the way home that day and no one was there. It wasn't until the next day that I received a call that informed me Shirley had been arrested and was on the front page of the newspaper. I ran down the street to the closest newspaper stand and couldn't believe what I was seeing.

The *Saint Joseph News-Press* articles and television reporters stated that Shirley was being charged with a murder. Not just any murder, but the murder of her daughter-in-law that took place twenty-four years ago at the time of her arrest. I was baffled. There was no way that this woman I had worked so closely with for the last six years could be responsible for something so disturbing

and vile. How could she keep such a secret? I had so many questions, but, yet no answers. I started questioning every conversation that her and I had ever had.

As the story unfolded more, the *Saint Joseph News-Press* stated that on November 28, 1981, Shirley's daughter-n-law, Rhonda Burgess, the mother to the grandson whom she was raising, stopped by her house on Mitchell Avenue and got into an argument with Shirley's son Michael. Rhonda threatened to take Michael Jr and leave town, which didn't set very well with Shirley, so she walked to the bedroom, picked up a shot gun that was hidden in the closet and returned to the kitchen to find them both still arguing. That's when Shirley pointed the shotgun at Rhonda and pulled the trigger. Not just once but twice.

If that wasn't bad enough, Shirley and her son, Michael, waited for it to get dark then loaded Rhonda's body into their van, drove up to Andrew County and buried her on the property that they owned there. After that they returned home and cleaned up the mess in the kitchen. They made a promise to never speak of that day again, but somewhere along the line one of them broke that promise and spoke about it in front of others. It was one of Shirley's granddaughters that ratted her out. Shirley's granddaughter Meghan had been arrested and called Grandma Shirley for bail money but when grandma refused to bail her out, Meghan then spilled the beans about the murder that took place long ago. Immediately detectives took action and located the remains of the body exactly where Meghan had said it would be. DNA proved that it was in fact the remains of twenty-two-year-old Rhonda Burgess who had disappeared back in 1981. Detectives and Crime Scene Investigators requested a search warrant and searched Shirley's house; even after twenty-four years, they still found some of Rhonda's DNA in the kitchen. Special equipment was brought in and located blood splatter that was wiped cleaned and covered with new wallpaper and deep in the cracks of the hard-wood floor, they still found traces of her blood as well. Shirley and Michael both were arrested at that time.

On January 27, 2006, Shirley A. Milbourn was sentenced to thirty years in prison for second degree murder and her son Michael was sentenced to eight years for the disposal of the body and destroying evidence. I haven't spoken to Shirley since the day before she got arrested. My last words to her were, "Have a great night." I can't help but think about Michael Jr., who obviously is now an adult, but what about all those years that he spent with his father and grandmother telling him that his mother walked out on him. How many lies did they tell that poor incident child? Would his mother ever had changed? That's something we will never know. Shirley destroyed that chance the day she pulled that trigger. Maybe Rhonda had seen a dark side in Shirley and Michael and just wanted to get her son away from them, or maybe what Shirley had said about Rhonda was true. Maybe Rhonda was a horrible mom who liked to drink and do drugs. That still did not give Shirley the right to do such a vicious thing. There are so many questions that I would love to ask, but I know I will never have that chance too. Yes, I could write her letters, but I want to remember her the way I knew her, that happy go lucky security guard, that skipped everywhere she went and not as a convicted murderer.

If it weren't for meeting Shirley, there is a good chance that I would still be naive and trust people that I shouldn't. She taught me that it's not only strangers that you should worry about, it's also those closest to you. Just because they are family, or a close friend, doesn't mean they won't lie, hurt, betray, or even kill you. We all have deep dark secrets that we would like to keep hidden, granted it's fair to say that most of ours isn't murder. Just remember that no matter how long you have known someone, or how well you think you know them, you should always question peoples motives and stories. I wish I would have.

365 Days a Year Preston Craig

In the winter of 2001, I was sentenced to 60 months for a Felony breaking and entering (B&E,) plus 36 months for previous charges to be served consecutively in the Department Of Corrections. (D.O.C.) I was hysterical that I had gotten so much time for my first offense. But I was ready to get it over with. As the guard transported me back down to "Big Red," Forsyth County Detention Center, I looked over my shoulder to see 3 guards snickering at me because I told them I would walk, and no charges would ever be brought against me. At least I was hoping for a better outcome. Because the fact of the matter is I'm innocent, and I'll proclaim that until the day I die. I didn't know what my future held, but I knew that my time in "Big Red" would mold me into becoming a better Father, Christian, and Man that God set out for me to be.

The jail was separated by two wings, the east wing, and the west wing. Each wing had 12 floors, 4 cell blocks per floor, and 50 cells per block, which allowed "Big Red" to house 4800 inmates, men and women. But it was so overcrowded that it housed more like 6200. As we walked towards our cell blocks, there was smell of that filled the air. A pungent smell so foul it that put your heart in fear. It smelled of blood and death. You could feel the murderous spirits around you, and the pain coming from the condemned cells. During the intake process, which takes about 7 hours, Forsyth County Sheriffs was booking me in. They put me against a wall and patted me down for any drugs or sharp objects. The officers made me strip of all my clothes. "Squat and cough 3 times," the guard demanded. To make sure I wasn't holstering anything up my two cheeks the good "Lord" gave me, I squatted and coughed 3 times as told. As I resumed my manly position, I was told to grab a towel. ("Grab those towels and hit the canister!"). Knowing that I was living under the rules of the D.O.C., I did as instructed. I grabbed my towel, and my little bar of soap that you can usually find in a hotel, which has no fragrance and could clean Kool aid stains off jailhouse floors. I jumped in the shower in which we were allowed 3 minutes. They took my picture and fingerprinted me, as they finished booking me in, I was told to grab a roll away mat, and some short thin blankets that were supposedly used to keep inmates warm in an already known smoldering desert. And I knew from that moment on, my life would never be the same. Being 6 hours away from my family and kids, and living in a man filled dungeon for the next 5 years would be a tough barrier to overcome and being uneducated didn't make matters any better.

As about 30 other guys and I made our way upstairs, we had to line up in single file and walk the 1/4 mile down "Fates Lane," the longest hall in the jail that connected the east wing with the west wing that housed the female inmates. And the only thing separating these predators from "fresh bait" was an ironed cast steel solid door, with a one by one foot window that allowed the guards to see who they were letting in before opening the door. I heard the guard call out my name, "Mr. Craig, D-Block, cell number 8." I went to my cell and shut my door. "Clank," the door slammed. "What up homie," I heard a guy say. "What's up," I said. The room was dimly light so I could barely make out the figure approaching me. I bawled up my fist anticipating a fight. In just that moment the guy bawled up his fist as well. "Come on motherfucker take your best shot!" I yelled. Here I was in this "6 by 8" foot cell, that had a two beds made of steel attached to the wall instead of each other, one stacked above the other so they resembled bump beds, a toilet bowl that was also steel, that could flush hot and cold water, and four white walls that gave me the impression that I was in a psychiatric ward instead of the county jail, with a guy I didn't think I knew about to throw down just confirmed my impression. Just then the guy took another step right into the light allowing me to see who I was about to damn near murder. He

burst out laughing so did I. "Damn cuz I was about to bang on your ass," I said. "You wouldn't have far," he replied. So there I was in my cell with my cousin, catching up on old times and sharing the latest gossip about who got killed in the last few years, the women we've been with and what we planned on doing to be better fathers and men in society when we got out. Time seemed to fly after about 3 hours, I laid down on my 6-inch thin mate on cold steel. And wrapped myself in a blanket that was about two feet shy of serving the purpose. I started to ponder on what I had done so badly in my life to deserve such a harsh sentence. I cried because I had more to live for than myself and my life was now being robbed. I was serving five years for a crime that was all a misunderstanding. I believe everything happens for a reason, and maybe God allowed this to happen so the progression of becoming a better father evolved.

The next morning I was awakened by a loud irritating noise, "clank," "clank," "clank." The noise just kept going on and on. "What," I yelled, obviously frustrated after having been woken out of my sleep at 4:30 a.m. "Mr. Craig, roll up your belongings, you're going to D.O.C." "So soon," I said, angry it had only been a day since I had been sentenced, and I was hoping to see my kids, their mothers and my parents before being shipped nearly 5 hours away. But from the way things looked that wasn't happening. So I rolled up my belongings and headed off to my new home for 5 years. What a journey this will be I thought to myself, still trying to comprehend how I got myself in this kind of mess. As we arrived at the Dallas Correctional Facility, located in Dallas, North Carolina, I was relieved that the 5 hour trip was finally over.

"Welcome to Prison you miserable pieces of shit," the guard yelled. "For the next couple of years I own you bitches, you will do what I say when I say and we want have any problems will we," the guard said with such cocky arrogance. "Sir no Sir," we replied with a tone to let him know we wasn't too pleased at being called his "Bitches." "Come on sissies get off the bus and line up single file."

Just then a guy, who I would later come to find out was named "Tyrone," aka Killer, jumped out of line and hit the guard so hard he shattered his jaw and knocked 4 teeth out. He said, am not no so sissy or bitch." This evolved to a fight breaking out amongst the inmates. ("Damn you got knocked the fuck out,") I said to the guard, stating a line from one of my favorite movies, "You should have been bobbing and weaving." Just then about 20 Special response team (SRT) members, came running up with riot gear on. "Freeze everybody get on the ground." Inmates were so busy fighting like savages in a dogfight, shanking (stabbing) who ever got in arm's length of their blades. That they never heard the shotgun blast from the guards 12-gauge shotgun, which the guards normally used to retain order. One guy got cut so badly that he was holding half his face in his hand. And screaming I don't' want to die Lord and asking for forgiveness of his sins.

All the new inmates and I hit the ground as quick as possible, shielding our faces from the toxic matters released as they deployed tear gas. (A toxic chemical used for crowd control.) As the fight ceased and the smoke cleared, there was 12 dead; 8 inmates and 4 guards. They had lost their lives for another man's actions. And I was serving time for one's actions I guess we had a lot in common that day, the dead and I. We both were at the wrong place at the wrong time, and both serving time for another man's crime. I learned a lot from seeing those men die that day, it taught me to mind your own business or become somebody's business. The guards came out screaming. "Get in line shut up don't say a word." And I saw from that moment to "watch your back." Because reality was, I had no one to watch my back and I was scared shitless. Not just for my life but also for the knowledge of knowing if I didn't watch my back I wouldn't never make it home to be that great father I so desperately loned to be.

I went throughout the rest of the day without another incident, and ran across a couple people I knew back from the hood. One guy in particular caught my attention. He stood at 5 feet 7

inches, weighed 225lbs with a medium build, black and grey hair from the years he had aged, he had a scar on the left side of his face that he obtained while in a bar fight that led to his sentencing of 12 years. I knew his face but couldn't quite put a name to him all I knew he was named after a state. I went outside on the yard and was amazed about what I saw. To the right was a little building that looked like a storage unit, it turned out to be a little convenience store for all your personal needs. Behind that building was another building that looked like a shack. As I approached the building I heard a woman moan. "Yes daddy give me that dick" and "Oh baby you so big." "You so bad," the guy said, "Now hush before someone hear us." About 5 minutes later an inmate I met earlier "Tony" and this beautiful guard came out the shack. I had to catch my drool; The girl looked like she fell out of Heaven. She stood about 5'8, 174 pounds, milk chocolate complexion with a Coca Cola body, 36DD's and a bubble booty that double bounces when she walks. And I'm sure she had a milkshake to bring all the boys to the yard.

I returned to my own business and ran into a building they used as a church and for inmate's recreational activities. I was going to work on some music I had just written and needed to get it out. The church was a beautiful, all white building with wooden double doors; carved on the doors was Jesus holding a cross, and carved under Jesus was the saying, Only God can judge me. Obviously that was a lie I thought, but I would come to love this place it had a piano, microphones and even an alto saxophone. It felt more like a vacation than prison and that's what it became a vacation. I got ready to enter the building but almost forgot to ask for forgiveness for the lustful sin I had just committed. So I stopped and prayed for forgiveness and direction and the strength to be strong to make it out alive back to my beautiful kids. I entered the church grabbed a microphone and started to sing. I was singing, "Lift my eyes to the hills," a gospel song I had learned in church. I sung my heart out, feeling like the weight of the world had been lifted off my shoulders. I didn't realize this but my world as I knew it was about to change forever. And I was ready for change I had so desperately needed and longed for change for a long time.

About twenty minutes later, two elderly guys walked into the church, and approached me. "Excuse me young man do you have your high school diploma?" "No sir!" I replied. "Well did you know if you obtained your G.E.D. for every three days you attend class you get a day knocked off your sentence?" "I do now," I replied. "Where do I sign up?" After a while I got into classes and time started to really fly by. I studied every day, I was occupying my mind everyday with as much knowledge as I could. The two men who approached me earlier turned out to be my teachers as well. They were college professors at the community college next door, and volunteered their time so we could obtain an education. I was grateful to have them as my teachers and they made learning fun and easy. I really enjoyed going to classes, every day we had different activities and games to make learning fun and easy. I obtained my G.E.D. in less than 4 months. By going to class every day and studying I was able to do exceptionally well on my test.

By the time I knew it, I was on my way home. I had managed to get a 1½ years taken off of my sentence because of good behavior, and another year for finishing my G.E.D. classes. I was glad I got to experience prison, it molded me to be the man I am today, and allowed me to obtain my G.E.D. I was excited after only serving 26 months I finally had the opportunity to see my family after two years. On top of all else my G.E.D. allowed me the chance to go to college to obtain a Bachelor's degree, in business management and music production. Which will allow me to secure a financial future for my family, and be a more reliable person. I believe by going back to school and obtaining something so valuable towards my future will allow me to be a better father, son, and Christian, that God set out for me to be. I believe my time in jail allowed me the chance to be a better man and obtaining my education allowed me the chance to be in college today. I regret nothing and I'm proud of the route my life has taken.

Days That Repeat

Kelsey Frazier

Every day, like clockwork, I would wake up, and hear nonsensical ranting throughout the house. There came a day when I stopped listening. I'm sure whatever my father was wailing about seemed important to him, but it was often a trivial matter. He would yell about items he himself lost, and go into a rage if someone didn't help him find them. It wasn't easy growing up with a violent father, but I was use to it. We all were. My brother became so use to it that he adopted it. If he wasn't being unreasonably mad, then he was subdued. In his moments of depression he would look practically lifeless at times. I would see him mindlessly staring at his bedroom wall. His body there, but his mind somewhere else. I didn't blame him, because I too wanted to leave. It was as if we had been living the same day on repeat for years. When my mother and I weren't working, we were trying our best to make angry men happy. Every day there was a new war we had to prepare for. Until one day, when my mother had finally had enough. She was done, and so was I. Everything had gotten to be too much. I was ready for a new chapter in my life. I had spent too much time catering to people that couldn't handle their emotions. I needed to focus on me. There was a journey I needed to go on. I had been in the same place, with my days on loop. I needed to embrace a new found freedom, be grateful for my second chance, and discover my identity.

We talked about how we would get away for a long time, and finally it was happening. I had been saving up for years working at jobs I could barely stomach. I always told myself that it would be worth it if I could get out. We decided to leave one weekend when my father would be on a hunting trip. I gave my mother my savings, we rented a moving truck, and found a reasonably priced apartment. I felt a lot of mixed emotions as we moved the first few boxes into our apartment. It was by no means glamorous. A Big, cold, and uninviting place that reeked of pesticides. The walls and counters were made of concrete. My mother use to call it our "concrete fortress." I think to try to bring excitement to our poor circumstances. It didn't matter to me though, because any place was better than being home. I remember vividly one night when I was a young child. I had woke up feeling very sick, and went to my parent's door to wake my mother. I tried to be quiet as I called to my mom in the darkness. When she heard me she was startled and her torso rose up as she gasped "WHAT!? WHAT HAPPENED!?" She looked around to see who was calling her. She got out of bed, and came to me. She was shaking as she told me not to do that again, because I could have woken my father. We had been living our whole lives on edge. Now there would no longer be nights like that, living in fear.

We adjusted quite well as time passed. Months went by since the move. I had been job hunting, but had no luck. It didn't matter much though, because we only had one car. One very old barely functional car. My mother knew this couldn't last forever, so she made an appointment at a car dealership to check out our options. The place was nice, and as we walked in I noticed that new car smell people refer to. Everyone seemed so friendly here. After a few discussions, and test drives, we were able to find the perfect car. I was so excited because now it would be a lot easier for me to get to work when I found a job. Irony is a funny thing, because next thing I know the Manager is racing us to the door of the dealership and asking if I'm interested in a job.

I was assured that it wasn't complicated, and that the "cars sell themselves." I was still nervous. I knew literally nothing about cars. A guy named Jake took me under his wing, and showed me the ropes. He was very kind and helpful to me. I had to do an online training course, and I didn't expect to enjoy it so much. I loved learning about how the engines worked, and history of cars. After some time I began to see the people there weren't as nice as they seemed. It was a cutthroat job. I began to notice all the guys there had families to feed, and it was clear they were

going to do whatever it took to get more money. They lied and cheated people out of their money. Some of the guys would swoop in and take clients from others. I found out after that Jake was only helping me because he would receive a bonus if I stayed with the company for 6 months. It was a dirty business, and I didn't want to work there anymore. I knew I could find another job. It might not pay as much, but I realized I would rather work as hard as I can honorably, then have a job like that. Which is what I did. As a babysitter. It was a huge step down from being a car salesman, but it's all I could get. I felt privileged to have a job at all. I had a lot of spare time though. I wouldn't work every day because they didn't need me, so the rest of my time was spend looking for more work. When I wasn't doing that I was chatting with some people that lived in my apartment building.

I had seen several college students, every day, which would come in and out of my apartment building. At times I would have discussions with them. They seemed smart, but not necessarily more intelligent than me. They were so busy, but relaxed and confident. I didn't understand how they could be so calm when speaking to me when they had a lot of things to get done in a short amount of time. I asked a lot of questions about how they were able to do that, and they showed me their different ways of time management. After a while I started to feel like college wasn't such a scary thing. I looked into what I would have to do to get into college in the fall. It was April, so I needed to act fast. I studied really hard, and took a GED exam, and passed each section on the first try. I was so thrilled and so grateful for this opportunity. I counted the days waiting for my scores to go through so I could enroll at Missouri Western State University. After my scores were received, it turned out that it wasn't too late for me to enroll in a summer course, and so I did. I regretted taking a math class for my first class, even though I got an A

I felt terrified my first day of classes. I got a good grade in my summer class, but that was just with one class. Now I have more classes. I was thinking to myself about how it had been about 10 years since I had been in a classroom. On top of that the math class I had wasn't really a class in my opinion. It was a computer lab, with no lecture, and it was self-paced. In the Fall I would be in real class rooms, with participation, and assignments that had due dates. That was new to me that was something I had never had before. That was scary. I didn't know if I would be able to do it.

I never had a true sense of life before. Now I was more than just living. I had a purpose. I had goals, and was working towards something. It felt like I was free from the things that held me back in the past, and I was given a fresh start. I didn't know how things are going to turn out. It was a big risk going to college. I could waste lots of money, just to end up having to drop out.

The struggles I've went through so far were not easy, but now I've found it to be worth it. I am free to make my own choices, grateful to be in the place I am, and to finally have a sense of who I am.

Educated Deficiency

Kelsey Frazier

Enlightenment is reached when one embraces that learning is an endless journey. Taking in and evaluating the information given to the mind is something that not all people do. As people learn differently, they either discover how they learn, or they don't, and then possibly miss out on lessons that could have enhanced their mind. After reading "School vs. Education" by Russel Baker it is clear that he is writing about learning that happens throughout life. Baker goes through the learning process of a child into adulthood, and takes the reader on a journey that will have them questioning what they have learned and how that has shaped who they are. They might ponder how a bad habit was learned, or who taught them a certain skill. People are constantly learning every day, and what is learned isn't necessarily beneficial, but that can be changed. Both parents and teachers educate children, and daily inform young minds about the world around them. That is wonderful, but are they always going about it the right way? How do we make education better? There are many solutions to that, and they involve keeping the student in mind. For better learning, educators should be impartial, adjust teaching to individual academic needs, and respect their students.

Developing an impartial approach to educating can help open the minds of young learners. Giving an unbiased opinion with multiple viewpoints can show students that they are free to have their own opinions. I've heard many students express their frustration by the strict one sided demands put on them by teachers. Baker states, "During formal education, the child learns that life is for testing. This stage lasts twelve years, a period during which the child learns that success comes from telling testers what they want to hear" (Baker 225). In other words, Baker is trying to say is that after children discover that they can tell educators what they want to hear to please them, then the children decide to take the easier route so they can succeed. The children might have conflicting opinions on something they are doing, but they are just doing what they think the teacher wants. Sure we all have tests we have to take, but if educators were more impartial and made classes seem more like a discussion rather than a lecture, then I think this would cause less stress and that would lead to students learning better.

Just as there are different types of people there are also different types of learners, which means educators should try to adjust their teaching while keeping that in mind. There are many techniques and ways that people learn. Educators shouldn't just assume that a child is ignorant because they can't understand. As Baker puts it, "If the teacher expects little of the child, the child learns he is dumb and soon quits bothering to tell the testers what they want to hear" (Baker 225). Basically, Baker is saying that if an educator expects less of the student, then they presume they are ignorant. If the students feel there is little hope, then they will give up. Often I feel that this happens when a pupil has a teacher that teaches in a way that the student is unfamiliar with or has trouble understanding. If the teacher were to use a variety of teaching styles and examples for the material then that would help to ensure more students are academically success.

As education is constantly changing with new information discovered every day, one thing that shouldn't change is mutual respect between educators and students. When I was younger, and as school years passed by there is one thing that I remembered, and that is was my 5th grade teacher. I remember everything about the way she taught, and the jokes she made while teaching. This is because of the mutual respect and kindness that we shared. She was the first educator that who made me happy to go to class every day. There was a point Baker made by saying, "The child learns that while everybody talks a lot about the virtue of being smart, there is very little incentive to stop being dumb. What is the point of school, besides attendance? The child wonders" (Baker

225). What Baker is saying is the child is told to be educated, but feels there is little reason to, and questions why education is important. How I see it is that students are taught to be respectful of their teacher, but if the teacher isn't expected to do the same then the student begins to view the education system as being unjust. This leads to lack of interest, and the student giving up on their education. I think that if students had a mutual respect with their teacher that could bring interest and making education more enjoyable for both the teacher and the student.

Learning is a process that is different for everyone but it can't efficiently operate without impartially educating, diverse teaching methods, and mutual respect. Being unbiased when discussing and teaching material can give students the chance to feel free to be themselves. Not only will impartial interactions promote creativity in students, but also the methods that are used can help, too. We are all created differently and that means that educators should adapt the education process to fit a variety of learning styles. Lastly, one of the key factors to help flourish learning in the mind is respect between the educator and student. Having a friendly respectful relationship with a teacher can make the student have a better attitude towards the material and going to class each day. No one can predict one single solution that will help improve education. It will take many steps and cooperation between students and educators. Hopefully education can be ameliorated, because proper learning is essential for life.

Baker, Russell. "School vs. Education." Introduction to College Writing. Sixth ed. Ed. Missouri Western State University, EML department. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2010. 225

A Better Soldier and a Better Man

Samuel Gouldsmith

“Is that what you're going to do in combat, Gouldsmith? Freeze? Let your battle buddy die because you couldn't do your job?” yelled my instructor. My hands wouldn't stop shaking. Neither did the needle that I was holding. “No sergeant!” I yelled even though I couldn't see straight. The hot humidity of San Antonio made sweat pour down my face and into my eyes, and the hot temper of Sergeant Manzo made the process of giving an IV run right out of my mind. I couldn't help but be shaky. We had only practiced giving IVs in the classroom at a slow and controlled pace. But now we were in the field and the instructors, field matter experts, were yelling and shooting off blank rounds trying to let us get a taste of what a combat situation could feel like. At the time, it felt like border line abuse. Now it's been almost three months since I've been out of training and I understand why they had to do what they did. Fort Sam Houston, a prestige medical base for all branches of the military, doesn't just certify anybody. They produce elite combat medics and ensure those who can't handle the pressure are weeded out quickly. Fortunately, I was one of the 300 in my class that made the cut. My hands grew steadier and my mind grew calmer but most importantly my character grew as a person because of the events that took place at Fort Sam Houston.

It started with the training. At four o'clock every morning I would drag myself out of bed and get ready for physical training (PT). By four-thirty I'd be ready to go on the covered training area (CTA) waiting for a platoon sergeant to march us over to the PT fields. Being a combat medic is a physically demanding job so physical fitness is a necessity. I remember the platoon going on a two mile run in the pouring rain. We were cold, wet, and miserable. The harder we ran, the harder it was to see. Every drop of rain came falling down like mad little hornets aiming right for our eyes. When we reached the finish line, the sergeant told everyone to get a battle buddy and carry them back to where we started. Private Graham was the closest guy to me. Being about 6' and 170 pounds he was a good match up and I quickly called him out. Grabbing one arm with one hand and the same side leg, I threw him over my shoulders. About half way back, everyone was instructed to switch roles. When I was the one doing the carrying, I couldn't stop thinking about how tired I was. With each step, Graham seemed to get a little heavier and it could have been so easy to quit. So easy to say I don't want to do this anymore. But the thought of letting my instructors and battle buddies know I couldn't support them when they needed me to was a far worse pain than any physical activity they could put me through. I dug deep and found the strength to get where they wanted me to go. I did it. I made it through every task they threw at me. Regardless of how exasperated I was, I pushed myself to the limit and then went even farther. That made me proud. Even after graduating from combat medic training I carry this mindset with me. From working out, to playing sports, or just taking on chores around the house. I always try to push myself until the task gets done or I set a new standard.

Once PT was complete, the company went to their assigned barracks to shower and change into uniform. We were marched to chow and then to class. Class at Fort Sam Houston isn't like high school or college. It is an accelerated course that specializes in taking a year-long EMT course and condensing it into six weeks. Five days a week for eight hours a day we would be in a classroom learning the basic requirements to succeed as combat medics. This involved bookwork, homework, and practical hands on assignments. But the learning day didn't stop once we left the schoolhouse. We were marched back to the barracks and would study for another two to three hours every night. As unpleasant as it was it was what we had to do to stay on top of our grades. No one wanted to be recycled to the beginning of the program and be kept from seeing their loved

ones any longer than they had to. Looking back its almost funny realizing just how much fear motivated everyone. It certainly did for me and left its mark so well scarred in my brain that I still give 110% in my college classes today.

Regardless, if I was on my way to PT or to the schoolhouse, there was a platoon sergeant with me at all times. A sergeant that sticks out in my mind was my own platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Vann. Now, leadership is expressed in all different forms but Sergeant Vann is what a good leader should act like based off Army standards I'm familiar with. Loyalty, duty, respect, honor, selfless service, integrity, and personal courage were all in his nature. From tasks like making sure my uniform was in regulations, to showing the platoon how to properly clean our weapons, he would take us through the whole process step by step. We could tell that in a professional manner Sergeant Vann cared for his platoon. He always made sure we were squared away. This also included smoking the hell out of us when we acted more like fools than professionals. But once the price had been paid for our actions he would then forgive and forget. Everyone would carry on and dismiss the situation as if the incident never happened. Except now they would walk with their backs a little straighter and their mouths a little more shut. I don't think there is such a person that can model the perfect leader but Fort Sam Houston seems to possess many individuals that can balance the concept of transactional leadership with transformational leadership and the end products are well trained medics. This is the kind of leader that I want to be. One that can find the balance. One that is fair and for his people but at the same time never tested to be a pushover. I know that those at Fort Sam lead me in the right direction and will continue to do so for others.

Finally, the last few weeks of 68W Army Medic Training were upon us. The moment every combat medic had been waiting for. A two week long field training exercise in the Texas hills would test our skills physically, mentally, and academically. Everything we had been taught was about to be tested against us and the weight of the anxiety started to come crashing down on our shoulders. But with little time to process the stress I was already being told where to go and what to do. The heat from the sun beat down in harsh, merciless waves. The humidity was so thick I could feel individual beads of sweat run down my back under my uniform and body armor. I wasn't worried about the medical aspects being my downfall. After all, for the past four months that's all I had been doing. But the weather mixed with the terrain was what made me start to second guess myself. When my squad was put on foot patrol we had to walk up the side of a hill and carry our battle buddies in all their gear on stretchers in five man teams. The distance varied but it wasn't uncommon to carry each other anywhere from five to seven hundred meters nonstop. We had performed similar drills numerous times at the schoolhouse, but now the uneven ground and inclined planes changed up the whole dynamic of the task. My ankles were rolled several times, my back hurt from carrying my battle buddies, and from head to toe my body was covered in a heat rash. Just getting up off my cot in the morning became a challenge of its own. I was almost to the point of quitting when I woke up to the sound of Sergeant Vann banging on the tent door. "Get up! Start packing your shit and be ready to roll by 13:00!" I couldn't believe it. Maybe the dehydration or heat exhaustion set in but I didn't realize that our time was up and it was time to go back to base. Even now, I can't explain the abundance of joy I felt that day knowing I conquered the terrain and obstacles of the course till the very end. I was now a certified combat medic.

Every event at Fort Sam Houston stretched and shaped me until it slowly but surely turned me into who I am today. I wouldn't be as strong without the PT. To be quite honest, I would still probably be the couch potato I was before I left. Without the intense school work and fear of not going home, I don't think I would keep my classes at the priority level I keep them at now. Even

though being recycled isn't something to worry about in college, the thought of failing seems unacceptable. Sergeant Vann showed me what a leader should act like and I will continue to always aim towards having those traits for as long as I live. Finally, I know I can perform tasks in environments that not everyone can. That's what the components of Fort Sam Houston do to those that are willing to better themselves. It makes the weak strong and the weary steady. Fort Sam Houston did it to me. Making me proud to be a medic but also proud of who I am and what I stand for.

A Man on a Mission

Samuel Gouldsmith

As I walked into Grandpa Ron's house ready for the interview, I noticed Grandpa's ammo boxes on one counter top and Grandma's books on another. The same scene I have looked at my entire life and whether it was the twelve gage or the nostalgia, I had never felt more safe and at home. I walked past the kitchen and into the living room and found the old man reading a magazine in his red recliner that has been around longer than I have. In my family, we know the recliner is Grandpa's spot. Almost like the throne for a king, he has earned it by taking care of the family; we make sure he always has his place to sit. The chair, like many other things, Grandpa built, repaired, and has fixed on numerous occasions, finding a new way to make it better than the last time. Even though the chair itself is nothing more than fabric and metal, the stories and memories that exist because of it are what make it stand out. I can't count the number of life lessons and old stories that Grandpa has shared with me while sitting in that very chair. Just how Grandpa has put work into his recliner, he has always put the same effort into his family. When it needs fixed he is there to give his advice and make it better than it was before. That is what I love and admire about him; his strive for perfection is what made him into the respectable, loving man he is today.

Even in his young years, Ronald Lee Gouldsmith was a hard worker. As early as his young teens, Grandpa Ron would spend his days with friends working on cars in front of his home in Independence, Missouri, stopping only if they ran out of daylight or his mother told him to come inside. Either way, Grandpa Ron was not one to sit around and do nothing. He always had grease on his hands or dirt in his hair from tinkering with a car or anything else he could get his hands on. He attended school up to the tenth grade at William Chrisman High School before dropping out. I was rather surprised when he told me this. Here was the man I thought could take anything apart and put it back together better than before, but he didn't finish school? When I questioned him about it, his answer was simple and a lesson many of us have learned before: "I just did not keep up with my studies and I fell behind" (4:21). His enjoyment for hands on work distracted him from his studies and ultimately caused him to drop out. Given that it was 1959, it wasn't uncommon for kids to drop out of school. What they did after that was up to them, but Grandpa, being the working type, wanted to make money and he knew that would require a job. Up the street from where he lived was a newspaper company. Grandpa went in and asked for employment. Sure enough, they hired him on as a paper thrower and he tossed the daily newspaper to houses in his neighborhood. While Grandpa talked about his life growing up, I couldn't help but think to myself that even though his choice to not finish school stunted his academic life, maybe it put him right where he needed to be to make one of the biggest decisions of his life.

Grandpa and Grandma met and married young and I always wondered what made them think it was a good idea. When I asked him about it, it was easy to tell he remembered clearly by the ease that he showed along with the smile on his face. At a small hamburger joint in town, Grandpa and his friend Tom went to grab a bite to eat. As they sat down, Tom couldn't help but notice the cute cashier taking orders at the counter. He gave Grandpa a nod in the general direction and it didn't take Grandpa long to figure out who he was talking about. Tom asked my Grandpa if he would ask her out for him and Grandpa said, "If you buy me a hamburger, and a Coke, and a french fry I'll do it" (31:30). Tom agreed and Grandpa took his time eating, letting Tom sit in his own nervousness. Finally, Grandpa got up and went to the counter. He felt nervous too but being a man of his word held up his end of the deal. He walked up to the young lady and asked, "Do your parents allow you to date?" and Grandma replied, "Yes, and you can take me home from work if

you want to” (32:00). Hearing this, I couldn’t help but laugh. Grandpa went from asking a girl out for his friend to getting a girlfriend himself. I asked what was going through his head when he heard that. Suppressing a laugh he said, “Oh my gosh, I never even thought I had a chance” (32:17). After the conversation was over, Grandpa walked back to Tom and sat down. Tom, anxious to hear the news, was on the edge of his seat. Grandpa looked him dead in the eye and said, “Tom, she said she will never go out with you” (32:48). Later that night, Tom went home crying and Grandpa took home Linda Bullard and saw her every day after. A year later they were married. A year after that, they had their first baby on the way. Going from a kid that made money to work on cars to a man with a wife and child I asked Grandpa what made him so sure he had made the right choice to marry young? Without a second thought or waver in his voice he said, “I just knew” (7:50). I believe what he knew was that he was going to have to work more, that there were going to be nights when the baby wouldn’t go to sleep, What he knew then was that he had a family to take care of and he was going to make sure they would always have what they needed, and I could tell he was proud of the results..

In the years to follow after Grandpa and Grandma’s marriage, Grandpa still buckled down and worked hard to support his family. In 1960, he switched jobs from the newspaper company to JM Ragel making welding tools. He explained that money was tight and he worked long hours but Grandpa rarely missed a day and always did his part to bring home \$47.00 a week. Although Grandpa Ron could turn a stack of metal into an engine, he couldn’t keep his money in his pocket. “I was very fortunate that I had a wife that knew how to do that. She would make meals that were low budget. She knew how to pay the bills and put money up. Just because we had extra money didn’t mean we got to spend it” (15:30) Grandpa said. It was good that someone in the house knew how to manage money because Grandpa was becoming aware that his growing family was starting to outgrow their house.

While sticking to a very tight budget, and putting in labor for over two years, Grandpa was able to expand his house to over double the original square footage. Going through family projector slides, I got to see that the house was originally no more than the length and width of a double trailer. “The living room was so small that when I laid down on the floor the kids would have to walk over me to get around,” (18:19) Grandpa explained. Intrigued by the idea that a man with little money, little time, and little knowledge of construction built a house to twice its original size, I asked him how he managed to pull it off. His method was hard work and dedication. “When I was done with my work at Ragel I would come home and work on cars in the garage. Then I would take that money and start a piece of the house. If I built a wall wrong I would tear it down and build it right” (19:54). I sat back in my chair and just thought to myself for a moment, letting his words sink in. I realized that building the house was only half the challenge, but going through trial and error must have been both frustrating and time consuming. Nonetheless, being the hard worker that Grandpa was and is, he made it through and now has the biggest house on the block as proof.

After years of working long hours for little money, Grandpa Ron caught a break in 1981. He got a new job at Bendix Corporation as a tool maker. Moving from \$47.00 a week to \$575.00 was a big relief financially. On top of making more money, his three boys were getting older and the house was finished, so Grandpa could finally start to relax and enjoy his hobbies.

Grandpa never settled for “good enough” and didn’t quit until whatever he was doing was done right: “I always did what it took to make a living” (22:50). From building a family to building a future, his drive to do his best has turned him into a good man and an even better grandpa. When I asked him why he worked so hard, he told me something I would never forget, “The wife would get the check, and I would get the satisfaction of knowing no one could have

done that better than me” (40:09). After learning about how Grandpa built his future and, more importantly, why he made the choices he did, I will forever want to incorporate his beliefs of working hard for self-satisfaction instead of self-gain into my life. This conversation with Grandpa has inspired me to work towards my own red recliner; a red recliner that symbolizes the same love, work, and dedication for life and family as Grandpa Ron’s does.

Gouldsmith, Ronald L. “A Man on a Mission.” Personal interview. 30 Sept. 2016.

The Strongest Stone May be a Book

Samuel Gouldsmith

Even the biggest and tallest of castles, if forgotten and abandoned, will fall to the ground as if they were made of nothing more than twigs being tossed by the wind. In the essay, “One Writer’s Beginnings”, by Eudora Welty, a writer from Mississippi with a Bachelor’s from the University of Wisconsin in 1929 who afterwards studied at the University of Columbia’s Graduate School of Business, tells how she came to love reading and writing; she explains that her parents were large influences on her pursuing reading as a lifelong hobby and passion that she continued through the duration of her life. Unlike Welty’s consistent love for reading and writing, my path was not as smooth or constant; like a dilapidated castle being restored to its original state, the once bold love of literature had to slowly rebuild itself inside of me.

Welty and I share very similar foundations that built our castles of literature. Starting at a very young age, both of our mothers read to us. These were the first stones to be laid that would later build beautiful sights to behold. As Welty’s mother would read to her all over the house, the stones started to form walls and the walls formed comfort. As Welty states, “She [her mother] would read to me in the big room...in her rocker... in the dining room... and at night when I’d got in my own bed” (298). My mother was very similar to Welty’s in the manner that she was always reading to me in hopes that I would then want to read to myself. Little did she know, she would not be disappointed. Although they were simple in structure and in plot, I started to pick up books on my own. I remember the pages of *Barney and Friends* and *Blue’s Clues* being as thick as cardboard and how fun it was to pretend that *The Magic School Bus* could be real if I just believed hard enough. Even though I didn’t realize it at the time, literature was an escape from the world. A world that had ugly divorces where everyone says “it’s not your fault”, scary neighborhoods that Mommy said we would move out of soon, and mean kids at school that judged the size of someone’s stomach before the size of their heart. When I took refuge in a story, I never had to be alone or even be myself. I could be anyone or anything I wanted. But then, like a catapult hurling its fire blazing boulders, my newly built walls took siege and came crashing down from their blows. The education system, of all things, raided and conquered my castle. Stripping me of my stories to escape to, it decided what, when, and how I would read. No longer did the magical worlds that I was accustomed to fill my mind. Instead, in their place, were dull, monotonous pages of nonfiction that I found unbearable. As a third grader I didn’t care for books such as *How Plants Eat* or *The Biography of Mark Twain*. They didn’t grasp my attention and, two paragraphs into the first page, the zoned out stare of boredom would fog over my mind. I might have been more intrigued if these titles instead read, *The Man Eating Plant* or *The Biography of Captain Underpants*. After all, books were supposed to be an escape from reality, not about it, right? My teachers quickly made sure that I knew I was wrong and with the scale now being tipped in the unfavorable direction of nonfiction, I had written off literature all together by the time I was in the third grade. Even if we did get to read a book of our choosing, I had such a distaste for reading that even my favorite works of fiction couldn’t put out the flames of repulsion towards literature. For the rest of the year I only took part in reading if it was the deciding factor between getting to play at recess or being kept-in for incomplete work. All my effort put into building my castle had now been mutilated or destroyed. Not seeing salvation as a possibility, I abandoned literature and pushed it to the back of my mind to the farthest extent that I thought I could.

The beginning path that Welty and I shared now forked into their own unique trails. As Welty went down her trail, she always had her literature to guide her, adding book after book to make her castle stronger and more beautiful. My trail was an endless line that kept wandering

aimlessly into an abyss of useless interests. Trying to fill my time, I turned to activities ranging from Pokémon cards, to riding bikes, to playing video games. Although these were amusing, they didn't do much except provide entertainment. They didn't benefit my education and hardly touched, much less expanded, my imagination. In retrospect, I now envy Welty and her constant love for books. When referring to classic novels, Welty states, "I located myself in these pages and could go straight to the stories and pictures I loved..." (301). It wasn't the amount of love or number of books that she read that I envy, but the numerous times she was able to escape into the worlds they held while I was stuck in a school with no time for such tales. My frustration and bitterness in my personal life and the lack of pleasure in school became an inferno that started to reflect on my grades. How could a third grader become so hateful and unhappy? The answer is the death of an imagination and the lack of faith in optimism. Having no fantasies to escape to and a hostile life at home, I started to shut down and not care about any form of education. This remained the case for several years until I reached my junior year of high school. It was there that I met a teacher who, without even trying, turned my personal and literature life around and gave a new perspective on life itself.

The lack of interest in literature now stemmed from the problem of lack of understanding. The years of trying to avoid the once loved subject had now caught up to me. Mrs. Fulton, my English teacher, was the first teacher to recognize that some of her students were falling short in areas that were crucial for success and reached out her helping hand to guide us back to where we needed to be. After fixing many grammatical misunderstandings, she introduced the concept of using nonfiction to invigorate and support fiction. I learned that by elaborating the rules of reality, stories could become more shocking when these rules are defied, or the exact opposite; elaborating the rules of reality creates inevitable doom that makes stories more dramatic. In the *Maximum Ride* series, real science was used to create the wonderful fictional characters who, with their unique mutant abilities, entertained me for the month or two it took to read the series. After several of these short tutoring sessions, and several book series later, the idea that I could actually progress and enjoy literature became something I sought after, not just in fiction, but also in nonfiction. Just as Welty believed that, "[In regards to her book *Our Wonderful World*] I was the only child I know that grew up with this treasure" (301), I believed that I was one of the few children that grew up with an instructor that could out teach all the rest. Not because she piled more lessons upon us, but because she made sure none of her students were left to fail. I took this newly founded motivation and turned around my academic career and went to rebuild my castle, which more importantly rebuilt my imagination and happiness.

With these new tools, I rebuilt everything from the ground up. Except, unlike before, I now reinforced every stone with both creative and informative text, I lined the walls with cannons of grammatical structure, and I had hundreds of soldiers that provided protection from negative thoughts of life. Once more I found it easy to take refuge in the pages of books where I could stand by Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* or just as easily sit next to Laura in *The Little House on the Prairie*. Like many teenagers, I felt as though I was ready for anything that life could throw at me. The restoration came in phases, but so did my optimism and motivation. Like Welty says, "Childhood's learning is made up of moments. It isn't steady. It's a pulse" (302). Even though I wish these pulses came more consistently, I'm glad they came at all. It reopened my mind to imagination and now gives me happiness that I utilize frequently.

Now being a freshman in college, my castle still stands tall with its original glory and additional enhancements. I am aware that this is not the end of the road and that more struggles are yet to come. Instead of fearing the idea of these threats, I instead embrace them; looking forward to their contribution to strengthen my walls and dig my roots deeper into a passion I have put so

much work into. While Welty's castle has stood much longer than mine has, it serves as a constant reminder of how long the passion of literacy can keep the mind open to new information both for fun and for fact. Even though Welty and I's paths took their share of different turns and turmoil's, the end results are structures that are both mighty in thought and information. The love of literature is a powerful force to be reckoned with. Giving one the freedom and power to not only think outside the box, but also giving one the power to make the box itself. Let these castles stand tall and stand in numbers. If they lay in green dingy moss and crumbled scattered ruins like mine did, picking up a book and laying a new stone is the first step to restoration. My passion came back slowly, but in the end I realized that looking into the distance of imagination from atop a castle made me abundantly happier than looking up at the ruins of what could have been great.

Welty, Eudora. "One Writer's Beginnings." *Introduction to College Writing*. 6 ed. Ed. Missouri Western State University. McGraw-Hill, 2010. 298 – 303.

Lessons from the Painful Moments in Life

Scott Jackson

As we push through life, filling our daily routine with the mundane, we sometimes forget life has a way of sneaking up on us and shocking us back into reality. Should it take a life or death situation to cause us to remember to appreciate the loved ones in our lives? I pondered these thoughts as we rode in the ambulance to the hospital for the second time in as many weeks. In the months before that day we had found out my wife was pregnant. We were elated; this was to be our first child together. It was all very story book until one day she ruptured a disk in her back, sending her and our baby into a downward spiral of health problems, doctor visits, and bed rest. Not allowed any pain medication for fear of complications, she was facing this painful injury with no relief available. As days turned into weeks the pain began to manifest itself visibly. She had bags under her eyes from days without sleep and the smile she used to always wear was now an ever present grimace. As I looked into her eyes I could feel her pain without a single word having been spoken. Time marched on and the baby continued to develop in her womb. Another round of doctor visits after an especially difficult illness sent us to the hospital the first time. The doctors told us her body was now trying to reject the baby, which was the body's way of protecting itself from foreseeable doom. More medication, more bedrest, more pain. They called upon us to make some difficult choices, but how do you choose whose life is more important? It's in moments like these that hidden reserves of strength, hope, and faith manifest themselves to battle the fear and despair that are seeking to consume and destroy us. Through all of the suffering and uncertainties I am reminded of how fragile and precious our lives, and the lives of those we love, really are.

As I pulled into the hospital parking lot I was expecting another routine evening of "the same." The same chair, the same staff, the same questions, the same visitors wishing us well, the same waiting. Today was not to be that day. As I walked towards the main doors, I was greeted with a waiting ambulance. In a mere heartbeat my day transformed from routine to overwhelming, all encompassing, fear. The very person I was there to see was the one strapped onto the gurney they were loading in that ambulance. She tried to smile but the pain, the fear, the dread, could not be masked. They hurried me into the passenger seat and away we went. We were being transported to a hospital better equipped to deal with premature births. Our time for waiting was coming to a close, but it was too soon, way too soon. This shouldn't be happening.

I tried to listen to the words they threw at me as they apprised me of the situation. The words were lost in a jumbled mess as the receptors in my brain were overwhelmed, overloading with worry and panic as the worst possible scenarios played out. The stench of the cleaning chemicals were assaulting my nose, making me think of all the sick and dying that had ridden in here before. How many had made it? How many hadn't? The sounds of the medical equipment in the back tried to bring some reassurance that something was happening, although I knew nothing of what it was. The scenery outside the window blurred by without shape, unrecognizable in my current state. The closer we got the greater the resistance pushing back against time, forcing it to all but stop in my mind.

I can't say I breathed a sigh of relief when we arrived but we were closer, closer to what I'm not sure. A team of specialists rushed us into a room and started running tests, hooking up machines, and asking questions, lots of questions. As we waited through the night for surgery they kept reassuring us, telling us the longer we could wait the better off it would be for the baby. I'm sure that was meant to be encouraging but it wasn't received that way. It meant too much time to think, too much time to worry. I've seen enough death and carnage in my life, where does it end?

When you come across a problem you take care of it; that's how I was raised. But sitting there in that sterile hospital room, devoid of any personality, reality was crashing in on me like the waves of the sea. Wave after wave pounding in. I couldn't fix this. I was helpless. My wife and unborn son could die at any moment and I was dependent on someone else to save them. This isn't how it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to take care of my family. Me! I had lost all control. The fear and uncertainty were kicking in the door, anxious to consume me because I couldn't fix this problem!

They finally called us into surgery. The scrubs they gave me were a cheap, scratchy, disposable set that didn't fit well but I had to make do. It seemed as if they were trying to replicate the sun with all lights glaring down reflecting off every surface in the room. My ears were assaulted by the beeps and buzzes of innumerable gadgets scattered about as if to draw my attention to them. My wife looked up at me from the operating table seeking any support I could muster. I listened intently for any whisper or hint of the outcome until finally my lack of patience drove me to look over the partition to see for myself. They were cutting through the final layers of still beating flesh to remove my son from his home for the last forty weeks. His first cries are etched into a permanent record now in my being. They rushed him off to the NICU, Intensive care for premature babies. My wife could recover now and my son was alive!

The battle wasn't over yet. Born twelve weeks premature, his lungs weren't developed enough to breath without help and his skin was almost translucent, allowing me to see the muscles and veins moving beneath the surface. Weighing in at 2.76 pounds he was tiny, too small to survive on his own. For the next forty-nine days we called the NICU home. Uncertainty was the only thing guaranteed, an ever present roller coaster of emotions was my constant companion. Every joyful moment tempered by yet another life threatening set back, only to be repelled by hope as another success battled through despair. Fear and uncertainty would rear its ugly head again repeating the cycle that made up our daily life. All of this a constant reminder of just how fragile a life can be.

Throughout our time inside the hospital we interacted with many families in similar circumstance, fighting familiar battles. I watched as babies would come and go, staying for various lengths of time, dependent on their ability to survive without this technology. Despite the life-saving efforts available, not all of the babies made it. Such a short span of life for a family to cherish. In contrast, my precious son Garrett, finally got to come home! After all of the fear and uncertainty, hope and joy prevailed. Over the last 15 years I've watched him grow, with no residual side effects from the harrowing birth, but the memories are ever present. More of a reminder now, just how fragile life can be, to enjoy the smiles, the laughs, the hugs, for we are never guaranteed tomorrow. Cherish those moments you spend with loved ones and create joyous memories together you can carry with you.

The Struggle to Read

Scott Jackson

Throughout the course of my life I've solved baffling mysteries, discovered ancient civilizations, scoured the ocean for a mighty whale, and battled angry dragons. Adventuring super hero I'm not, but for those who are willing, a lifetime worth of adventures is only a good book away from being yours as well. For some, myself included, the reading alone can be the adventure (or horror story). In his autobiographical essay "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," author Richard Rodriguez writes of his own struggles on his quest to learn to read. Not having been read to as a child, his only experience with books was through school work, so the cold, lifeless, words on the page brought about fear and loneliness. Only through remedial reading classes, coupled with sheer determination, were his reading difficulties overcome. Once overcome though, he devoured books of all genres to fill a self proclaimed void inside himself. The situations from Rodriguez's story to my own differ, but I can relate to both the struggle and the triumph found in his experiences. After the barriers to my own reading troubles were broken through, the world of books became my hiding place.

Reading to children at a young age can help shape their own hunger to read. In regards to his own childhood, Rodriguez writes, "For both my parents, [...], reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible. Never did I see either of them read an entire book. Nor did I see them read for pleasure" (293). Not having seen it modeled around him by his parents or having experienced being read to, Rodriguez struggled with reading. This was not the case in my childhood. I can remember being read to any chance I could. My parents would pull books off the shelf and read in various voices to make the stories come alive, feeding into my overactive imagination. My favorite book that they would read to me was a big, thick book, with several short stories. They would growl like a bear or tickle me like a spider was crawling on me during the different stories and I would plead with them to read another. Unlike Rodriguez's childhood, my parents helped plant the seed for the desire to read and make the words come to life on the pages before my eyes.

Whether the desire to read is there or not, the simple act of learning to read can be difficult. The author describes his painful memories of reading:

Reading was, at best, only a chore. 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.... The sentences of the first books I read were coolly impersonal. Toned hard. What bothered me, however, was the isolation reading required. (Rodriguez 294)

Rodriguez is relating his struggles in reading. From his lack of understanding, basically boring, lonely perspective, reading would be challenging. My own difficulties differ from his. Schools in the early seventies didn't acknowledge learning disabilities as they do today. When the words and letters were constantly jumbled up, rearranged, or backwards, I was labeled as lazy, slow, and stupid. Today it's called dyslexia, but then I was just a problem student pushed off onto the next teacher to deal with. In first grade I had to sit apart from the other kids because my teacher didn't think I was concentrating enough. My letters would be in the wrong order or simple math problems confused me when the numbers changed places constantly. Scolded for struggling and set apart from the rest of class instilled a fear in me I carried with me through the rest of my days in school. Unlike Rodriguez, I had experienced the emotions a story could evoke when others would read to me, the trouble was making that happen in my own reading.

The anguish associated with learning to read can be overwhelming by yourself, but occasionally someone steps into your life and helps you through these obstacles. Rodriguez retells of the nun that helped him in his remedial reading classes after school:

One day the nun concluded a session by asking me why I was so reluctant to read by myself. I tried to explain; said something about the way written words made me feel all alone—almost, I wanted to add but didn't, as when I spoke to myself in a room just emptied of furniture. She studied my face as I spoke; she seemed to be watching more than listening. In an uneventful voice she replied that I had nothing to fear. Didn't I realize that reading would open up whole new worlds? A book could open doors for me. It could introduce me to people and show me places I never imagined existed. (Rodriguez 294)

While this is not the pivotal moment in overcoming his fear, Rodriguez is writing about the teacher that helped him start his journey into reading. The one that took the time, observed his life, and encouraged him, thus changing his life forever. That moment in my life was in the third grade. Mrs. Ochse was teaching her last year of almost three decades, and I was lucky enough to be in that class. I don't know if she was familiar with dyslexia or not, but she helped me to learn to cope with it. I can remember her always coming by my desk, kneeling down and helping me rearrange the letters, sounding out words, and carefully correcting my numbers. She expected me to put forth the effort and always had a compliment or praise ready. She was the teacher you just couldn't bring yourself to disappoint. Mine was not an AH-HA moment of realization, but that year opened my eyes to the possibilities and taught me to persevere. Like Rodriguez, I found the teacher willing to step in and help, opening up the world of books to me.

After the help is given and the possibilities are revealed, books can quickly become a comfortable companion. Rodriguez writes, "I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books. Early on weekday mornings, I'd read in my bed. I'd feel a mysterious comfort then, reading in the dawn quiet" (296). After he worked past his fearfulness of reading, Rodriguez actually grew to enjoy that quiet time spent losing one's self in a book. His passion for reading mirrors my own. After I discovered how to work through my reading difficulties, the library quickly became my favorite place at school. I would check out books and stay up reading by flashlight until the early morning hours. Weekends and snow days, I would quickly finish my chores so I could hide out in my room and read until I couldn't keep my eyes open any longer. Rodriguez and I both found that mysterious comfort, or contentment, in reading.

With all the difficulties and struggles of my youth, books became my safety net or my hiding place. I could quickly forget about the problems around me as I opened the next great adventure, written as if it were mine alone to experience. Like Rodriguez, I've had to push through and overcome my fears. My dyslexia hasn't gone away, it won't. I've learned how to cope with it. It still makes school work more difficult. Reading passages several times, or over analyzing questions to ensure accuracy, makes for slow going, but it has also caused me to be more conscientious. If it wasn't for my struggles in reading though, I'm not sure I would appreciate a good book as much as I do. Passing on this love, I've spent countless hours reading to my son in those same animated voices I heard as a child. I find myself, even now, being drawn to retreat into my comfortable chair and open up the cover on my next great adventure.

Rodriguez, Richard. "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." *Introduction to College Writing*. Sixth Edition. Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc, 2010 293-297

A Voice for The Voiceless

Scott Jackson

It's real, it happens, nobody likes to talk about it, and I pray you only have to imagine it. According to the U.S. Department of Justice website, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are affronted with this horribly personal violation before they ever reach 18 years of age. Here again, I pray you only have to imagine this, but if you are ever sexually assaulted, who would you turn to? Who would you rely on to be your voice, your rock, to assist you through the trauma, and help you to heal? Siobhan Jackson, a Sexual Assault Victim Advocate, is one of the people who would be there to help after a trauma such as this. Born and raised in St. Joseph, Missouri, she followed in her dad's footsteps by becoming a Law Enforcement Officer. It was from him she learned her sense of justice. Her mother taught her the necessity of compassion. During her days on the St. Joseph Police Department, she discovered a passion for working with victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. Returning to school to finishing her degree in Criminal Justice, she now works full time advocating for the victims much like she did as a police officer, only now she can help them much farther into their journey. She has spent the last four years building and growing the advocacy program at the YWCA. To gain a better understanding of the depths of this carrier field, I sat down and interviewed Mrs. Jackson. As I finished the interview I realized the depths of the challenges in advocating for someone that has lived through an intimately horrendous assault.

As if the job title of Sexual Assault Victim Advocate wasn't long enough, the responsibilities of that position are extensive. Mrs. Jackson leads the local SART program (Sexual Assault Response Team), which is made up of representatives from the police, sheriff's department, prosecuting attorney, hospital and advocates. When I asked what their purpose was, she said, "They really focus on what is the best response. The first response to a sexual assault victim is the most important response as to how that person heals and proceeds with the investigation and prosecution. It's that first response." To better explain, SART is a collaboration of agencies that hold each other accountable for the best interest of the victim. She is also a PREA advocate (Prison Rape Elimination Act), enacted to help prisoners that are victims of a sexual assault while incarcerated. Another area of responsibility is training and coordinating volunteers that respond to the hospital. Mrs. Jackson explained the importance of this by saying, "When somebody presents in the ER as a sexual assault victim, the protocol is enacted to call an advocate. The best practice dictates that the best response for a sexual assault victim is to have an advocate present there to help them through the process, to understand their rights, and to offer support during the exam." Then she added, "The exam itself is pretty intense and very hard on the victim." The advocates will also coordinate a safety plan, assist with temporary housing if needed, clothes, resources, and case management. The victim can also get help through the criminal justice process, follow up medical visits, friendship, support and counseling. In other words, the job of an advocate is to assist the victim through the healing process with as much or as little as the victim and or their family need.

While much of an advocate's time is spent assisting victims, they also have the responsibility of bringing awareness to the community by dispelling myths and presenting facts. Who is most at risk and how often does this happen are two questions that are asked most frequently. The answers are a little harder to distinguish. According to Mrs. Jackson, anyone can be at risk. The youngest reported case in St. Joseph was just a toddler, and the oldest reported case was a 92 year old woman, but a large percentage of the cases they see are between the ages of 20 to 35, so I asked her if it's a problem on college campuses. Her reply was, "The thing about colleges is you have a lot of young kids, 18 year olds, who are just leaving mom and dad's house,

and they get a lot of freedoms they maybe didn't have before. So they are experimenting with things, they're going to parties, they're probably engaging in a little more risky behavior. The freshman and sophomore classes, those ages, are the most vulnerable." She also added, "It's in those years you are wanting to fit in and make friends and go to these parties. They are seen as more of a target, there are more opportunities for assaults to happen there." Living in the heart of the country, the Bible Belt as it's been called, one might assume it would be a rare occurrence. Wrong you would be. In the last four years, her and her advocates have responded to over 180 cases at the hospital alone. In 2015 they responded 46 times and from January to October this year they have responded to 60 cases thus far. "I don't believe it's happening more, I think it's being reported more," she stated. Programs like Green Dot, used on some college campuses, teach bystander intervention to help reduce the risk of sexual assaults and part of Title IX mandates schools to provide training and resources on sexual assault. Anyone can be a potential victim, but with the growing awareness, more of the assaults are actually being reported.

After the assault has been reported, how does one find closure? To answer that you have to define what closure looks like. According to Mrs. Jackson, closure is different for each and every person. It could be from a criminal justice view, or a conviction, or many choose to just move on. That doesn't mean forgetting it, just moving past it. To clarify she said, "They may not look at the police and the investigation as something that is going to help them move on. Most of the time it re-victimizes them because there are so many questions about what were they doing, what were they wearing, what were they saying, what were they drinking. It was all about what the victim was doing, instead of going after the person who did it!" The common term for this is victim blaming, and it is quite detrimental to both the healing process for the victim and the conviction of the offender. Victim blaming stems from ignorance and fear. It is easier to blame the victim for their actions than it is to admit that something horrendous could happen to you, even if you do everything right. Bad things just don't happen to good people here, it must've been the victims fault. Ignorance and fear. In spite of this people can still find closure. It could possibly come through counseling, or some just try to bury it and to move on. No two experiences are alike, each person has to work through it in their own way.

Scouring through the lengthy process of advocacy, you quickly are affronted with the weakest link in the chain. In sexual assault cases it's most often one person's word against another, so how do you prove that something did or did not happen? When I asked how many cases actually go to trial, her response was, "Very few. The national average is 2%. It's not a lack of desire by the prosecution. The problem is, if they aren't given a quality case, if it hasn't been well investigated, if they don't have the evidence there to move forward, then how are they going to put that on trial?" Some of the laws are changing, education is taking place, and more people are aware of their rights. Still there are changes that need to be made. "More people are reporting, but investigation and follow through haven't caught up with it. Everything has to adjust to work with each other," she noted. There are changes taking place, but they are slow to materialize, slow to be implemented, and even slower for the effects to be felt.

There is no doubt that advocacy is a daunting task, full of struggles and setbacks. Exhaustion, secondary trauma, and clinical burnout are all common occurrences, but there are still so many that need help. Her passion was evident as she said. "When you realize that so many people have been....[sexually assaulted]....in their lifetime and I know this from the fact that, because, anytime people find out what I do, I hear, 'When I was a kid,' or, 'When I was a teenager!' It always starts off that way. That so many people are suffering in silence and have never said anything to anybody about stuff happening to them. It affects their relationships, it affects everything they do, it affects how they relate to people. But with the right help you can be

successful and you can move on, you can get through it.” Advocacy is not a glamorous job. The long hours and minimal pay can be a hindrance to those seeking nothing more than a career. But for those with the heart to see real change and impact the lives of the broken and sometimes forgotten, advocacy can be a rewarding career path. As a closing comment Mrs. Jackson gave me this, “The most important thing is to advocate for the people that don’t have a voice, who are vulnerable, and who are even marginal, that they have value and need to be spoken for too!” No one desires to suffer in silence, but many are. Who is willing to be their voice?

<https://storycorps.me/interviews/victim-advocacy/>

Am I Foxy Tori Kibbee

Combine the dark skin, brown eyes, gray hair, and coveralls with a plaid button-down long-sleeve shirt, the mind begins to form the image of an older man. He was a man that had integrity, who loved to see his family smile, that's until he went blind from macular degeneration. At this point the question being asked is "Who was this man?" He was Charles, my grandfather, though most people just called him Chuck or like a good friend would call him, Foxy. In the ten years he lived with my mother and I, he was my father figure, teaching me respect and manners. He gave me courage, taught me selflessness, and his passing forever changed the way I look at death.

Foxy first moved in when I was six years old and quickly became a man I looked up to, teaching me to respect people and to use my manners. He taught me how to be polite to others; although, I did have a very nasty attitude with him at times. I learned how to hold my tongue around my elders because if I didn't, the disappointing glare I would receive would instantly make me regret ever opening my mouth. I found that the more I didn't want to let him down, the better I became at crossing my t's and dotting my i's when I spoke, especially in public. He expected me to hold the door for people, including my mother, even though she and I didn't naturally get along most of the time. My mother and I would often argue, loudly, with each other over issues my grandpa was having. There would be times when he would cry because all he desired to do was live with people his own age, but my mother just couldn't let that happen. To her, his money was very important and was the only way we would survive. Watching him slide backwards into the couch, closed off, and scared would break my heart. He would always tell me later when we were alone, that he never raised her to disrespect others in that way, all while tears ran down his rosiered cheeks. I knew then that being respectful of people's feelings and having manners was important to have in life.

At first I didn't have the courage to stand up for myself, let alone him, but if he could serve in the Navy and stand up to me when I was giving him a horrible time before School, because no child wants to wake up in the morning, then I could Sure as hell be courageous and look out for us both. My mother was always giving him a hard time about making his own food, taking showers by himself, and for forgetting to take out our dog. I mean, her father, had served his country and worked hard on the railroad, yet she would throw objects like keys and hair brushes or, she would curse at him when he made comments that she didn't like. One day while she was verbally attacking him, I gathered my guts and decided to give her a piece of my mind. I yelled at her and told her to stop, that it was not nice to be hurtful to her father. She told me to shut up or she would shut me up, and that it wasn't any of my business how she treated him. The moment went as quickly as it came: though it did feel good to use my little cojones. The next few times I tried to stand up to her, it didn't go down as smoothly, and even if I couldn't stop her actions, at least I knew I tried. I have never lost that courage to this day. I can now stand up to my mother when she is verbally attacking me, without backing down. It has given me the ability to stand up for myself and for my beliefs. For some people, brave, or having courage, is not how they would describe themselves. For me, I do, because my grandfather taught me how to be.

On a larger scale, something I learned indirectly from my grandfather was to be selfless. The first time I felt considerate of someone else's needs before my own was when I gave up my room for him when he moved in. Grandpa had done something similar for my grandmother, Dorothy, years prior when she became ill. I remember in the summer when I had no school, he would tell me, Tori Lynn, you look so much like her sometimes I feel like she is right here with me

in the flesh.” That man always gave me the Spunk to do just about anything my little heart desired. Even to this day I know that when I feel like I can’t continue, he is there whispering “You can do it, or “You’ve got this; keep your chin up, Squirt!” Today I make small self sacrificing choices all the time like, taking time away from myself to help someone with their groceries and going to see my mother even though I know I am allergic to her animals. I know he would be proud of me for thinking of others and not just myself. I know that because of him I am a selfless person and I Wouldn’t have I any other way.

For me death hasn’t been the same since my grandfather passed away. It was mid-2008 and I was just about to start my junior year of high school. The last image I have of him is at St. Luke’s in Kansas City, tubes coming from his mouth and cords strapped to his chest, as a nurse plunged a tube down his throat to clear his airway. His face, rough with a five o’clock shadow, was almost gray. Hearing that Suction noise ripple through the room as it looked like he was choking was the last Straw for me; I broke. Seeing him there in that moment ripped me apart. He was supposed to be there when I graduated, to see me walk across the stage to receive my diploma. I needed him here to watch me blossom into a woman, to see me finally make it to college, and to see me become a wife and mother one day. He held on for some time, even though there wasn’t much of a chance that he was going to recover from the infections and bleeding in his brain. Once they took him off of life support and removed the feeding tube from his abdomen, he lasted seven days. Strong willed, he wasn’t going to give up without a fight. Or was it because everyone went to say their goodbyes except me? For a long time, I felt guilt for not being there to tell him I loved him, to say goodbye to a man that had been there with me in the warmest of summers and the most frozen of winters. Before I knew it, I was hardened to death, to people dying. I worked in a nursing home where people die and normally it would make others wilt with sorrow. I lost that emotion the day he took his last breath. I’d see someone die or hear of someone passing, and all I could do was try to look like a normal person grieving, When on the inside I was blah. Nothing, no words, no tears, just wondering how much longer I would have to pretend to be like any other human being dealing with loss. I no longer saw it as sad; shit happens. We all die. Its hard explaining to people why I Sound cold when being made aware of another death, but that is just what I took from Foxy’s death.

Today I carry with me all the good personal qualities he taught me. I know that I can be strong and brave while being a well-mannered woman most days. I think about him often, mostly of the happy, joy filled days we spent together, and I wish that life would have turned out to be different, but We all know going back isn’t an option. Moving forward is all we have. I take so many things from him that I feel like I still have a father watching over me. I hope that as I continue to grow older I keep the respect and manners, courage, Selflessness and maybe one day I might have a normal sense of sympathy when it comes to death.

Transgender Metamorphosis

Tori Kibbe

“I just remember going to bed that night and praying to God that while I slept, he would fix the mistake and when I woke up that I'd be the boy I knew I was supposed to be,” Derrick says to me. At six-years-old, he feels like he was born in the wrong body, but at that age, he didn't even know what transgender (a person whose gender identity does not correspond to that person's biological sex assigned at birth) meant. Early on he wanted to wear what the boys got to wear when going swimming, though he wasn't allowed because his mother explains to him that he was a girl. Struggling with self-conflict is hard enough, and it is even harder when someone is struggling with gender identity issues on top of that. We all have something about ourselves that other people don't always like, but being able to be who we are truly meant to be takes a tremendous amount of courage and willpower.

Derrick, being transgender female-to-male (FTM), talked to me openly about the struggle he and his family had in his early years. He explained to me how difficult it is not being able to express these feelings clearly when he was a child. “There were just a lot of disagreements during my younger years, because what my family wanted and what I wanted was vastly different from each other and I had no way of communicating my feelings in a way for them to understand,” he states. He began having a difficult time around the age that children start to form their own sense of style and are more verbal about how they feel. A six or seven-year-old Derrick, found him-self fighting with the strong women in his life. He fought with his mother and grandmother about his clothes, hair, and activities in which he would partake. He said, “Being born female and living in a small town ... where people don't really know much about the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning) community, they wanted me to dress the way a little girl should dress.” It wasn't easy for him knowing he was different. The self-conflict issues alone were hard enough, but adding his family into the situation made it even more difficult. His mother wanted to see him happy, but it is hard for a parent to grasp such a big change in their child. This proves his point that it's not just hard to be a transgender child, but its also hard being the parent of a transgender child and not knowing what they need to feel comfortable in life and with themselves.

People identify in many ways. In middle School, friends start asking questions about who is cute and that's usually when kids start to figure out where they are and how they fit in socially in society, this is just one way we identify ourselves. Growing up Trans makes it harder to label who we are. Most Trans people first identify as something else before their transition because just five years ago, being transgender was not widely publicized. Derrick tells me of the time that he becomes aware of his feelings for women, “Once I reached 7th grade and began noticing the feeling of attraction, I noticed that I'd rather sit with the boys and look at the girls. I realized then that I was attracted to women and I began identifying as Lesbian. He was living in Texas When he met someone for the first time that identified as transgender. Meeting this person was the turning point in how he viewed himself and how he would from then on out identify. Getting older made it more difficult to correctly identify himself and to be who he was, until he could transition on his own around the age eighteen. During this time, he started considering a name change. Derrick narrowed down his list to, two names and would introduce himself in the mirror with each one separately. Ultimately he states, “The name chose me and the meaning of the name Derrick, means a lot to me. I believe my name defines me as a person and my struggle.”

The meaning of his name is defender and protector of men, which I feel like it fits him well. He is someone who wants to protect Trans men and women alike, while defending the LGBTQ+ altogether. Finally, being able to correctly identify/ label himself made such a huge difference.

Someone Transgender today leaves them subjected to discrimination and assault of many different forms. Someone who is transgender can become a victim/survivor of physical, mental, and sexual assault. They also have to deal with discrimination when it comes to finding a job, shopping at the store, being provided medical care, and can even be subjected to death. Derrick tells me, "I feel an incredible amount of pressure to keep it a secret or on a need to know basis because of all the risks of being openly transgender. I need to make a living and support myself and my family and I certainly don't want to lose my life." When I hear the percentage rates of the crimes against the transgender community, I can't believe what I'm hearing. Knowing that he wants to be a spokesman, to educate and inspire others outside of his Trans community, even when the death of a transgender person is 50% higher than others of the LBGTQ+ is overwhelming. He states, "I believe that transgender people should have the right to have their stories publicized. I think it's time that this country begins to understand that there aren't just two genders and that not everything is black and white." Derrick has been a survivor of being refused medical attention; he has been discriminated against, and he even had his civil rights violated by the police when his life was threatened and he was physically assaulted. The police officers said there are no laws in place, in Missouri, to protect people of "his kind". He says to me with a quivering rasp in his voice, "The most hurtful part of today's society, is the willingness to murder someone's loved one simply because they are transgender." After someone that is Trans is murdered, they are often called the wrong name and have their gender labeled incorrectly, and then as a nation, we humiliate them even after death.

Taking action and educating our local areas helps people understand what being transgender really means, as a whole. To inform others that being a transgender person doesn't make a person any different than cis-gender (someone who's personal identity is that of their gender assigned at birth) people, they just want to be considered as an equal, just like the rest of the cis-gender population. With heavy breath Derrick passionately tells me, "The first step to resolving the ignorance of a subject is education. If I could change one view of the transgender community, it would be to help people understand that we aren't freaks. To know that we are not just lesbians and gay men trying to fit in to normal society or trick people." Having him in my life I have never felt any differently about him. When I first met Derrick, I was unaware that he was transgender. To me he was and still is a man. Even after he opened up to me about himself. I never felt anything but honor to know him on a deeper level. I was happy that he was able to confide in me about his transition.

Derrick has successfully navigated through some rough experiences while going through his transition. Some advice that has helped him get through his transitioning stages is that, everyone experiences their transition differently; not one person will transition like another. Knowing this allowed him to see that just because one person's results were one way didn't mean his would be. He needed to be comfortable with his results because his transition is his own. I wanted to know specifically what being Trans has taught him about himself. One thing he said that grabbed at me was, "Me being transgender doesn't change who I am as a person, it's my personality and my morals that makes me who I am, not being transgender." Just because Derrick is transgender it does not make him any less human, or does it make him any less than the rest of us. His inspirational words for others of the transgender community were, "You are not alone. In me you will always have an ally, someone you can count on to try to help you through the emotional toll transitioning can take on someone." I love the way he can continue to be strong for himself and other people going through tough self-identity issues.

For me, knowing Derrick gives me more willpower and courage to continue my journey being a cis-gender Pan-sexual (someone who is open to members of all sexual orientations or

gender identities). In no way, have I or will I go through as much scrutiny as he has or will. My experience with self-identity was different because even though I may get disapproving looks or people who do not agree with me, I don't have people scrutinizing me in the ways he has. The way he has overcome so much adversity to be himself provides me the reassurance I need to help him in his own journey to make our community aware of such a controversial topic. Something we both feel strongly about is that everyone deserves to feel happiness and to be comfortable with who they are. If you need support reach out, not everyone in the world is full of hate for the LGBTQ+ community. Keep fighting and if it gets hard just remember you deserve a good life as much as the next person. No one should struggle with self-identity issues alone. We all have something about us that could be a scrutinized topic in tomorrow's news.



The Power of Reading & Writing

Tessa McKinley

Have you have been so scared of something it shapes your whole life? Sometimes this “thing” that you’re so scared of might just be the most important thing in your life. For as long as I can remember, reading has ultimately always been a challenge for me. Even though my mom would read to me daily, I found the excitement of playing with my friends or watching television to be much more captivating. When my teacher recommended that I receive special education services during the 1st grade, I was scared that everyone would make fun of me at school. Just like Rodriguez in the essay “The Lonely, Good Company of Books” we were both placed in a small room that made reading scary. Although Rodriguez had a nun that was good to him and made him want to learn, I on the other had had an old mean lady that was rude, and forced me to read books I didn't care to read. They were both dark and small closet like spaces, and when I was little I didn't understand why this was happening to me. While reading the Essay “Superman and me” Alexie and I connected because we were both told we wouldn't make it in life we were to stupid to learn. This made me realize I wasn't the only kid you felt they had something to prove to those people. I never thought that I would like to read because of the day I was treated but while in the essay, “How I Learned to Read and Write” by Frederick Douglass, he too felt very low when he was called a nigger and told he would never be able to learn like a white man (270). If a man like himself could go through such horrible struggles then I to could one day enjoy to read and write as much as Douglass did. See to him the very act of learning to read and write was actually the thing that slave owners felt would be the cause of their slaves to leave their masters in search of a better life as they would become discontented with being a slave. After reading these essays I realized one thing Reading was the key to succeed. This was just the start to opening my world up to love reading and finding the significance and power it holds and even though reading has always been a challenge for me over the years, the words of Frederick Douglass, Alexie, and also Rodriguez have inspired a deep appreciation for my ability to read and to communicate my thoughts through writing. I hope that one day many more students just like me will have the will power to find their goals just like me.

Books can be very lonely to me and very scary sometimes, in this way is how I truly connected with Rodriguez. Growing up all the bad things seemed to stick with me. Most of my bad memories had to do with reading. My earliest recollection of reading goes back to elementary school, 3rd grade to be exact. My teacher, Mr. Campbell, loved to popcorn read. This was a game where he would pick someone to read then they would pick someone else and so on. For as long as I can remember I always had a fear of reading out loud, not because I was shy by any means, but because it was hard for me to spell, therefore some of the kids had to help me say a few words and then they would laugh. I never wanted to mess up, but I always did. I felt very alone like I was the only kid who hated to read or just bad at it. The thing Rodriguez and I both hated most was “...the Isolation of reading required” (294). While being in a special learning class I never hated something more in my life but for Rodriguez his teacher explained to him “A book could opened doors for me” She taught him there was nothing to fear. Not only did she teach him not to fear but she really did open his mind to love books. He started to read on weekends and loved doing it as a “hobby” his mother said.

As I read about Alexie’ experience of being an Indian boy, I felt angry for the way society treated him. I realized how lucky I am to have had the ability to learn to read and write as a child. Like Alexie, people who are oppressed in society today may not be encouraged to learn to express themselves through writing. Oppression keeps people down by making them think they are not

smart. The ability to read and write allows people to think about their situation in life by giving them the opportunity to learn about how other people live and allowing them to believe they can change their lives. Like Alexie, I hadn't realized the importance of reading and writing until faced with the challenge of wanting to accomplish my personal career goals. I remember my mom asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I felt scared because I was afraid I would pick something that I wasn't good at or something I didn't like to do. After going through the experience of orthodontic treatments to make my smile straight and bright, I realized how great I felt with the confidence of a new, beautiful smile. I decided I wanted to become an orthodontist so I could help others feel confident and beautiful too. Just like Alexie, I was told I wasn't smart enough, "A smart Indian is a dangerous person, widely feared and ridiculed by Indians and non-Indians alike". It's very painful to feel like you can't have what you most want in life. I can relate to the feeling of frustration at being seen as less intelligent. Before I was placed in that special ed class they told my mom I would fail the first grade. In the essay Alexie says, "We were expected to fail in the non-Indian world." This is what made us stronger than most. Just like him I knew I was smart to and i always also very lucky to be able to read the books I wanted.

Like Douglas, I realized that the negative beliefs of others could be the catalyst for change that would push me to reach my goals. I found encouragement to continue to believe in myself. Even though Douglas didn't have a supportive family like me, he was able to find encouragement through the poor white boys with whom he shared his bread in exchange for their help. He realized that he was better off than the poor children in his neighborhood and found a way to bargain for help as he wrote, "This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge" (272). Douglas realized that what his master had said was true because the ability to communicate would give him the power to change his life. Learning to read and write were just as valuable to people living in the 1800s as it is to people today. Douglas realized the very act of learning to read and write was actually the thing that slave owners felt would be the cause of their slaves to leave their masters in search of a better life as they would become discontented with being a slave. It was his master who had actually opened his eyes to the power of learning to read and write. As a slave, he was taught to do exactly as he was told and ask no questions. Douglas' master once said to his wife "A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master to do as he is told to do" (270). He hadn't thought that reading and writing were important for him, but thought his mistress was a kind woman for taking the time to help him learn. When she stopped helping him at the direction of her husband, she even became angry when she saw him holding a newspaper. What she didn't realize was that she was actually fueling his desire to keep learning. Douglas and I both can appreciate the people in our lives who doubted our abilities because in actuality, they fueled the desire that pushed us to go for our big dreams. Without these people he wouldn't have his freedom and I wouldn't be sitting here writing this paper that will change my life.

The world is changing and improving everyday. While television and iPhones offer more interesting things to capture our attention and seem to have taken away the significance of reading for students just like me who would rather sit and watch a Netflix series than to read a book they were told they had to read. The truth is that being lulled into a false sense of happiness may not be the best for us. Being entertained is all good until we realize we need to be able to express our own points of view. I never thought I would need to learn the significance of reading. If I would have never taken this English 100 class I might still never know or care to know. The way all of these writers came from such different backgrounds to become who they are the reason I and all students should know why reading is important it will be the reason we get to do what we love to do everyday. Even though I didn't learn tis until now I couldn't be more appreciative for this class

teaching me that reading isn't scary. This is just the beginning for my will to learn more through reading.

Douglass, Frederick. "How I Learned to Read and Write." *Introduction to College Writing*. Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2010: 270-276. Print.

Alexie, Sherman. "Superman and Me." *Writing about Writing: A College Reader*. Ed. Elizabeth Wardle. New York: Bedford St Martin's: 2014. 11-14.

Rodriguez, Richard. "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." *Introduction to College Writing*. Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2010: 293-297. Print.

Abel's Story

Leah Njoroge

Twenty two years ago, in Rwanda, 80,000 people were slaughtered by their own government. The Hutus, a tribe in Rwanda, was killing the Tutsi, a minority tribe in Rwanda. The genocide was sparked by the death of the Rwandan president, Juvenal Habyarimana, a hutu, whose plane was shot down above the capital, Kigali. Virtually the entire world had turned away and did almost nothing to stop the genocide. The Rwandan Genocide was a horrific event left to be told by its survivors and killers. I was inquisitive to learn the experience of a survivor, Abel Tafastye, and the drive that inspired him to keep going through this abominable event in history.

Abel Tafastye was born in Dire Watt, Ethiopia, on August 3rd 1977. His father was a Rwandan soldier and his mother a nurse in a small hospital in Dire Watt. Abel wanted to be a soldier just like his father. At the age of 16 years old he moved to Rwanda to follow in the footsteps of his father. Abel Tafastye distinctly recalled how wonderful life was in Rwanda. He also recalled that life was better in Rwanda because he was closer to his father who he adored greatly.

When I asked Abel if he reminiscenced April 7th, 1994, his face changed to an angry look and with a tone of great sadness he began to tell the painful story:

I remember that day like it was yesterday. It was an early Thursday morning and I was visiting my father at the Military base which I did every day. There was a sharp and quick noise as if something heavy had hit the ground. A soldier quickly grabbed me and put me in a room. He dropped his handheld transceiver and I quickly picked it up. Before he could snatch it from me, the voice on the other end of the transceiver yelled the president's plane had been shot down, and there were no survivors. The voice went on to mention the name of the soldiers in the plane and at the moment he mentioned Ali Rashm, I felt as if someone had pushed a knife into my heart.

As Abel explained his horrific event, I began to understand the disastrous impact that the genocide had in his life. According to Abel Tafastye, April 7th was the day hell reigned on earth. When I asked him to describe what he remembers about that day, he paused for a moment before responding. "The Hutus rebels raided the military camp. I could hear gunshots and I decided to hide behind a desk in the room that I was in. There was a loud bang on the door and a voice yelled "we have to finish them all". From a little crack in the desk I saw the rebels bring in bodies and dumping them in the room. After they cleared the military base I decided that I would have to find safety in the next village. I stumbled on bodies, and I was covered in their blood." This was a start of an inhumane attack of the Tutsis that would last for a hundred days.

Abel took refuge with other Tutsi refugees in a hotel known as Hotel des Mille Collines. For the next 21 days Abel and thousands of other refugees would hide in the hotel under the fear of the Hutus. I asked Abel to describe what were the living conditions in the hotel. He stares at a picture of him and Paul Rusesabagina, a hutu and the hotel manager to Hotel des Mille Collines who was protecting the Tutsi from the Hutus. "There was a lot of us in the hotel and we barely had enough to eat. The Hutus had destroyed the water system and we were forced to drink the water from the swimming pool. A lot of children were dying everyday from hunger and others from their infected wounds. Some of us had to sleep on the cold concrete floor. We would cover ourselves with bloody sheets and blankets to keep ourselves warm." Considering the trauma that the Hutus had to endure, they also faced harsh living conditions and less resources to keep themselves alive. Most would die from untreated wounds

or starvation. They were also forced to bury the bodies in hotel compound due to their own safety and wear bloody clothes from the dead bodies since most of them had no clothes.

On April the 28th 1994, the Hotel des Mille Collines was attacked by the Hutu rebels. Abel painfully recalls that day as the day the earth turned sour. "They made their way into the hotel and a few Tutsis hid in a small bathroom. It was about twenty of us in a tiny bathroom. There were small children and old women and men in the bathroom. We sat quietly in the room and whispered the Lord's prayer. For 8 hours we hid in the bathroom as the others on the outside fought for their lives." Abel took a long pause and his voice breaks before he continued. With tears running down his eyes, he continued to recall the painful memory. "I could hear women and children screaming for help. I could hear as the guns went off and as the machete cut in their bodies. Blood was flowing towards the bathroom and there was nothing we could but stand there. A little girl standing next to me started crying, and at that moment I remember saying to myself that we were going to die. One Hutu rebel broke the door and I recall looking into his red eyes. He started cutting the people with his machete. I hid underneath the dead bodies but the machete managed to get to me. It cut into my head, my cheek and my mouth.

"I silently laid there and waited for my eyes to shut and to never open. As I lay there I thought to myself that I would not let myself be defeated by the Hutus and I painfully left the hotel and walked to refugee camp 10 kilometers from Kigali. As I walked I would whisper, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. This verse was the only thing that gave me strength to keep walking." Even though Abel was an Ethiopian, to the eyes of the Hutus, he was one of the Tutsis. Abel reveals that he has no anger towards the Hutus and what they did to him. Abel believes that if he kept his anger he would have never been able to move on with the horrific event. Abel stated that being angry was not going to help him move on unless he forgave those who had ruined his life mentally and physically. "Forgive us our trespass as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The Rwandan Genocide with no doubt is a tragic event in history. I was inundated by the reality of how a government could do such an act to its own people. After hearing Abel talk about his experience in the Genocide, I now understand what a devastating impact the event had affected him emotionally and physically. Even with the experience of such an abominable event, Abel found the courage to continue living even though he was haunted by the voices of the killers and of those who died. He also found the courage to forgive those who had left him in an emotional and physical distress.

Tafastye Abel, Abel Tafastye's Story, Personal interview, 15th October 2016

The Absurdity of Withheld Emotion

Taylor O'Connor

I like to imagine how animals would react in awkward social situations that most humans are subjected to on a daily basis. I always imagine a panda awkwardly sitting in the corner of a crowded ballroom awkwardly chewing on his bamboo. He checks his watch hoping that the night would be coming to a close soon. Guests mill around passing comments to each other as if they themselves had read the manual on how to be perfect in every way possible, and this panda is just hoping to get out of this situation with as little conversation as possible. This panda used to be me... Luckily only figuratively. During my second job that I had ever had, I had the advantageous opportunity to work with people my own age. Being eighteen at the time you can imagine it was a culture shock that threw me for quite a loop. To my luck, one girl by the name of Caitlyn, broke the shell that I had spent years building up and allowed me to finally function as close to a normal person as I'll ever be able to. I will always be grateful to her for the way she taught me how to interact with other people and for being a friend to me.

I looked around from my vantage point in the corner to see if anyone was watching me. Satisfied that no one was, I turn back to my table to take a sip out of my drink and awkwardly wait for my break to be over. I look down to check the time on my phone. Still, with ten more minutes left, I awkwardly gaze around again checking my perimeter. Just as I lift my eyes, I hear a name shout from across the empty dining room.

"Taylor, why don't you come sit with us?" Amber, one of my co-workers asks from the only table that seems to be occupied in the restaurant besides my own.

"I'm fine" I said giving an awkward smile while trying not to meet her curious gaze.

She shrugged and went back to her conversation at her table. I went back to looking at my phone. Somehow only a minute had passed. I glanced back up and was interrupted once more as someone walked, over pulled up a chair, and took a seat at my table without saying a word. I froze in my seat and nervously sipped my drink as Caitlyn, a new recruit like me, began to eat her lunch. I kept glancing down at my phone and waited while seconds passed by like hours. Caitlyn, unaffected by my nervous demeanor, kept looking at me with searching eyes. Surprisingly, as I stare back at her I don't feel the urge to avert my gaze like usual.

"So what's up," she asks finally breaking the silence.

"Nothing much. What about you?" I manage to stutter out having been forced back into reality.

"Just taking a break," she says while still watching me.

I purse my lips and nod in an affirmational way as if that was an acceptable way to continue a conversation. I then continue my routine of checking my phone and sipping out of my almost empty glass. Finally, time was up, and I headed back to the kitchen, her eyes still staring at the back of my head as I sullenly walk away.

Sadly, this was a normal day for me. From the time I was two, I had been home schooled by my Mom. Besides a brief excursion into Christian school when I was eight, the only contact I had with people my age was when I visited my cousins. So with such little experience having a normal conversation for me was like running a marathon. As time went on Caitlyn often pushed me out of my comfort zone by talking to me randomly throughout the day which ended up exercising my imagination when it came to coming up with conversation topics.

"Hey what kind of shows and movies do you watch?" Caitlyn asked as she diced tomatoes for the salad bar.

I was off to the side preparing pizzas for the typical evening herd of customers.

“Umm, I like a lot of animated shows and movies.” I was trying to be discreet about the fact that I liked the forever unpopular Japanese animation, without lying, as I was never good at it.

“You watch anime, don’t you?” she asks again already knowing the answer.

Her eyes saw right past my facade and I shrug

“Yeah I do. Anime even inspired my decision to become an animator one day,” I say. My cheeks glowing with embarrassment.

“I hate anime. I always watch TV on Saturday nights, and it always ends up coming on during my shows.” She pouts playfully.

“It’s definitely not for everyone,” I say as I make pizza.

She then walks towards the salad bar with her freshly diced tomatoes, a smile on her face. Clearly she was happy with the response that she had gotten. After that day we both talked more and more, but it was still hard for me to talk to everybody else. Eventually she started sitting with everybody else during breaks, and that forced me to join the group despite my usual hesitation to engage in group activities of any sort, especially those of the social variety.

I looked at the pillaged buffet. Hesitantly, I grabbed an old slice of pizza and a somewhat fresher salad and walked towards my usual table. My co-workers were sitting at their usual table having an enthralling conversation which ended up in a great roar of laughter from the crew. The laughter having caught my attention made me glance towards the table out of reflex. As I looked up I caught sight of Caitlyn poking at a poor excuse for a chicken wing. She looked up and caught my gaze. She motioned with her eyes at the empty chair across from her and then back at me. I was caught in a trap! I risked looking like a poor excuse for a friend if I didn’t join the group of co-workers, still laughing at the joke that had encapsulated their attention.

I glance at my table and decide to make the leap. I walk towards Caitlyn as casually as I can muster. I pull the chair out and sit across from her. She smiles and goes back to attempting the consumption of her rubbery poultry. I look around and try to act inconspicuous. Everybody seems surprised at my change of heart, but returned to their conversations. Trying not to push myself too hard, I meld into the background as an observer. Despite not pushing myself to engage in conversation that night, I had still made a step forward. Even though I still felt nervous I felt like fitting into the group wasn’t quite as impossible as I made it out to be. Finally, I was confident enough to be around people.

After that night, I started talking with my co-workers and hanging out with them. Caitlyn and I became great friends and I finally had someone I could trust and confide in. For the first time in a long time I felt less like the lonely panda that spent most of his time holed up in corners, hiding from conversation, and more like a human being attempting to make good connections. Even today I use the tools she provided me with to get to know people, and to build stronger more fulfilling relationships. For all of the work she spent guiding me through conversation, and for being the best friend I could ever ask for. I will forever be grateful to Caitlyn.

The Journey of a Million Thoughts

Taylor O'Connor

“Creativity is seeing is seeing what everyone else has seen, and thinking what no one else has thought” Neil deGrasse Tyson couldn’t have prepared better words to describe a big problem that I am faced with today. “Thinking what no one else has thought” or rather “writing what no one else has written” has been a problem that clouds my judgement and tempts my mind to throw away good idea after good idea for lack of originality, despite sharing even a small similarity to someone else’s work. In “The Watcher at the Gates” Gail Godwin writes about a figment in our minds that tries to place safer alternatives in lieu of creative ideas that might need polishing to become a gem. Our Watchers attempt to keep us from failing by distracting us with everyday mundane tasks like fact checking, laundry, etc. Gail Godwin writes “I first realized I was not the only writer who had a restraining critic who lived inside me... when I was leafing through Freud’s ‘Interpretation of dreams’ a few years ago.” After Hearing that Godwin is still able to write despite strong mental protests from a Watcher, gives me courage to continue on my path of writing, and to hopefully one day work alongside my Watcher.

As a child, I battled and still to this day battle an irrational mind. I have a strong form of ADHD, which makes it impossible for me to focus on most tasks, and has made even the most mundane tasks a living hell to accomplish. When I was a child ADHD made it impossible for me to function in a normal classroom setting, so my Mom set out on a perilous journey to homeschool my abnormal mind, as well as the abnormal minds of my four other siblings. My Mom loved to challenge us with advanced studies in geology, literature, college writing, among others. I had a tough time with nearly every subject in school because ADHD made it impossible to curb my wandering mind. The only subject I could find myself paying attention to was literature. I loved to read and write stories, and having a class devote to the classics made me a very happy child. Even in my free time I was reading and after a while the library was having a hard time keeping up with my ravenous hunger for books, so I started my own collection. I was spending money that I earned doing chores at Barnes and Noble, and after a couple of years I was almost able to fill up two bookshelves. My love for books has helped me find out a lot about the world, and also helped me realize that I wanted to eventually become a professional writer.

For many years, I worked on my writing and even planned to become a writer until I ran into some problems. After a while I realized that a lot of my writing didn’t feel unique and this voice in the back of my head was constantly telling me that the material I was writing wasn’t good enough, and after exhausting a lot of book ideas, I finally gave up. I recently read an excerpt from Gail Godwin’s “The Watcher at the Gates” in which she states, “I was writing a novel, and my heroine was in the middle of a dream, and then I lost faith in my own invention and rushed to ‘an authority’ to check whether she could have such a dream.” Gail explains that this doubt led her to read a passage by Freud who quoted Schiller who was explaining the idea that you shouldn’t try to put logic to “the ideas pouring in at the gates.” Freud continues to quote Schiller. “In the case of a creative mind, it seems to me, the intellect had withdrawn its watchers from the gates, and the ideas rush in pell-mell, and only then does it review and inspect the multitude.” In my experience, I find myself throwing away a lot of ideas because they seem rough or too much of a stretch. Hearing Schiller explain that I shouldn’t let my Watcher over think my ideas has really helped me overcome my biggest problem, which was allowing myself time to nurture ideas. Now I give my ideas time to grow, and I’m finding it much easier to let the ideas flow because of it.

Gail decides that she wants to learn more about her watcher so she studies his behavior. Gail writes “I discussed him with other writers, who told me some of the quirks and habits of their watchers, each of whom was as individual as his host, and all of whom seemed passionately dedicated to one goal: rejecting too soon and discriminating too severely.” Hearing that every writer suffers from this problem makes me feel a lot less alone, and Gail certainly does a good job of explaining good ways to best your Watcher. Gail states.

There are various ways to outsmart, pacify, or coexist with your Watcher. Here are some I have tried, or my writer friends have tried, with success... Write too fast for him in an unexpected place, at an unexpected time.... Write when very tired. Write in purple ink on the back of a Master Charge statement. Write whatever comes into your mind while the kettle is boiling and make the steam whistle your deadline.

(Godwin 291)

These tips have been helping me work alongside my watcher, and now I am writing more and feeling proud of what I have been able to produce, unlike before when I couldn’t even finish brainstorming an idea.

I have been observing my own Watcher, and have noticed that he operates similar to my ADHD in the way that he constantly tries to stop me from getting work done, forces me to over analyze, and drones out real life conversations with other distractions. Gail writes “On a very bad day I once wrote my watcher a letter. ‘Dear Watcher.’ I wrote, ‘What is it you’re so afraid I’ll do?’ Then I held his pen for him, and he replied instantly with a candor that has kept me from truly despising him. ‘Fail,’ he wrote back.” Realizing that my watcher in a misguided way is trying to help me, even if it is by keeping me from trying in the first place, makes me want to find a way to incorporate his traits into my writings. Even though I haven’t managed to yet, hopefully one day we will be able to work together.

English 100 has also really helped me break out of my writer’s block. At first I was nervous about falling behind everybody in class, and not being able to perform, but instead of giving into my self-doubt I worked my hardest, and I feel as if I have grown a lot as a writer. Even though it has only been a few months, I have learned a lot, and am continuing to learn every day. Looking back and seeing the progress that I have made has given me new insight into how I can continue improving, and how I hope to one day write my own novel. Having a love for books, a good English class, and a Watcher worrying about my writing for me helps to keep things in perspective. I hope that one day everybody will be reading my work in the form of books, that I will have worked alongside my Watcher to conceive, and with the help of an English class that helped me to realize my potential.

Godwin, Gail. “The Watcher at the Gates”. *Introduction to College Writing*. Sixth Edition. Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies. Inc, 2008.

Tyson, Neil deGrasse. *Global Ideas from Pluto’s Challenger*. Neil deGrasse Tyson’s blog. 2009.

Who Do You Look Up To?

Taylor O'Connor

Parents play a huge role in our upbringing and for young boys, fathers play a huge role in how disciplined they become. I can tell you that having been raised mostly by my mom Jaimie with four other siblings, if my step dad hadn't been there to lay down the law, we would have been bouncing off the walls. *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore tells a tale similar to my own of two men named Wes Moore, who despite having lots of similarities, ultimately lead opposite lives. Unfortunately, for both Wes's, they weren't afforded the luxury of father figures, though Wes the author had grandparents that helped keep him in check Wes#2 had nobody to keep him under control. Though having a father around doesn't always help, I think that all children can benefit from a strong fatherly figure in the house, and I find it is my duty, and hopefully yours as well, to one day become the fathers that our children deserve.

The other Wes was raised never knowing his father, Bernard, who had left before he was born. Tony his older brother lived with their father, but Bernard wasn't a good influence on him. From a young age, Tony gets involved in dealing drugs, and Wes more of a troublemaker becomes a fight starter, and later becomes a drug dealer. Both boys could have benefitted from a father figure, but unfortunately their father refused to sober up and take care of his family. There are only two references in the book that show Bernard acknowledging Wes, and one of them happens to be the first-time Wes had ever met his father. Wes the author writes,

He [Wes#2] was running through the living room when he saw someone he had never seen before. A man sat on the couch.... The strong smell of whiskey wafted from his clothes and pores. Wes and the man returned each other's quizzical looks. Mary entered the room and stopped in her tracks. She would have recognized that "hangover lean" anywhere.... Wes looked at his mother, hoping she would explain who this man was.... The man on the couch looked up at Mary and asked, 'Who is this Mary' smirked and rolled her eyes. She could not believe his audacity.... 'Wes, meet your father.' (Moore 25)

The fact that Bernard didn't even know who Wes was, shows us exactly the kind of man that he is, and Wes and his brother sadly probably wouldn't have been better off with him around.

I was born in Kansas City, the second son of my mom Jaimie, who was 19 at my time of birth. My father Scott was an alcoholic who preferred to stay at home and drink rather than provide for his family. My mom, who worked a full-time job to pay for his habits, eventually grew tired of his harassment and laziness. My mom kicked Scott to the curb and went on to date, and later marry, my step-father Erik. I was only two at the time when Scott and my mom divorced, but I still have some memories. The most memorable was actually the last time I saw Scott. He was watching me and my older brother, and I was crying because I wanted to see my mom, who was out on a date with Erik. Scott grew tired of my tantrum and locked me in his girlfriend's basement so he didn't have to hear me cry. That was the last time we could see Scott for obvious reasons, and Erik stepped up as a father figure for us two boys. Though Trevor and I may be in a better position than Wes and Tony, all four of us share the absence of a father who would not have been a positive influence towards our growth as men. Trevor and I were lucky enough to have Erik come along and take over the reigns as a father figure, and we are very thankful for the help that he provided in raising us. Out of all the things he taught us, I believe responsibility has been the most beneficial. Wes and Tony didn't have anyone around to show them how to be responsible so they never looked at the adverse effects their actions had on themselves as well as other people.

Wes the author lost his father at the young age of three after a false diagnosis caused him to die of suffocation. Wes, his mother Joy, and his two sisters Shani and Nikki, lost a father, a husband, and a man who provided for the family. After staying in their house after the streets around them became more dangerous, Joy decided to move back to the Bronx with her parents, because she knew that she was going to need backup in raising her children. Wes's grandparents lived in the Bronx and set strict rules to ensure the safety of their grandchildren. Wes explains, "I [Wes] had thought my mother's rules were strict, but soon I realized that my grandparents' were many times worse. They made it clear that Paulding Avenue was their home and their rules would apply." (Moore 42) Wes's grandparents assuming the role of authority helped keep Wes from straying too far from the path, and even when he begins tagging and doing other bad things with his friends, they mortgage their house to help send him to military school.

When I was six my family and I moved to Indiana to live close to Erik's parents. Though my older brother Trevor and I were not blood relatives, Erik's parents treated Trevor and I, just the same as my three younger siblings who shared blood with them. They helped my parents raise us for a while and introduced us to The Frankfort Baptist Church. Having the support of our grandparents and our neighborhood church helped keep us on a good and wholesome path. Our grandparents had us sleep over on weekends, and we always did after school activities at our Grandpa's print shop. Even though we moved away from Erik's parents when I was ten, we were instilled with the same beliefs, discipline, and trust in family that they had worked hard to teach us. We never would have learned these values if Erik hadn't moved us close to his parents. So, like Wes, we had grandparents to help fill the role of an authority figure, and if we didn't we wouldn't have become quite as responsible as we are now.

Having grandparents to replace a father figure helped Wes realize his potential. Wes's grandparents had rules that kept him in line, they mortgaged their house to help put him through military school, and they loved him just as much, if not more, than a father would. The other Wes may have had Tony to replace their father, but it wasn't enough to keep him out of trouble. Tony was constantly telling Wes what he should do, but refused to hold himself to the same standards, which caused Wes to discredit everything that Tony tells him. Without the guidance of my step-father Erik, my mom Jaimie would have had to work multiple jobs, rather than stay at home and raise us kids; we also wouldn't have been as disciplined and self-motivated if Erik wasn't there. Fathers are there to provide love and a strong platform for the family to work off of. If the author Wes, and I hadn't had somebody to replace our fathers, we very well could have ended up just like the other Wes, or in an even worse situation. Good fathers are very important in the upbringing of young men, so whether or not you are a man or woman, you can contribute to a child's psychological growth by replacing or becoming the father that all children deserve.

Moore, Wes. *The Other Wes Moore. One Name, Two Fates.* New York: Random House, 2010.

I Do It with a Purpose

Au'sha Ramirez-Quevado

If you know me well then you'd know that everything I do, I do for a greater purpose than the one assumed. One of the things I do that holds a great purpose is reading and writing. Like myself, Gloria Naylor and Fredrick Douglass all wrote and read for and with a purpose. Each of these authors writes about their journey on how they became lovers of words, whether it was written for them or written by them. In "The Love of Books" by Gloria Naylor, she too writes about how she came across books and writing. She writes about what books, reading, and writing did for her. Naylor was born around the time African-American's lacked opportunities to gain education. Yet, in her story she is blessed to learn how to read and write. She had also came to find her voice through writing, she states, "From the age of twelve I made the vital connection between inarticulate feeling and the written word" (Naylor 228). Naylor using her new found voice then decided to write a novel called *Women of Brewster Place*. Her intentions were to touch the heart of her fellow Black sisters, but in great astonishment her voice spoke to many women, of many nations, and races. As for Fredrick Douglass he wrote, "How I Learned to Read and Write". Douglass was a young slave when he was introduced to reading and writing. His slave master's (Mr. Auld) wife Mrs. Auld had taught Douglass the basics, but that quickly ended. Yet, that did not stop him from continuing on to learn how to read and write. He had went on to use clever tactics to further his education himself. The drive Fredrick Douglass had was because reading and writing were skills needed to free him, mentally and physically. Being that he was a slave freedom was important to Douglass, so important in fact that he would risk his life to hold the knowledge of reading and writing. Reading these great author's stories led me to think deeply about why I too read and write. Reading their stories got me to realize that these skill to read and write aren't just skills, they're life changing for me and those around me. Like these inspiring authors, I too read and write to show my respects of those invested in me, to share the knowledge that books hold, and to free myself from ignorance or a small minded mentality.

You know those memories that forever stick with you? The ones that may weigh on your character, as to why you love or do a certain thing? Well I have a few of those memories. One in particular are the times spent with my mom going to libraries. I remember seeing my mom's enthusiastic facial expression as we entered the library. She would glow as she explained to us what the plan was for today. "Okay", she would say, "Go get some books you would like me to read to you." My sister and I would gladly follow her request. We would then be back at home sitting on the couch huddled up, first listening to my mom's steady voice reading to us. Then we would take her place in reading a page or two. As we read aloud, with every word we got right she would startle us with her excitement, yelling something along the lines of, "Oh my babies are so smart!" Until this day I carry her positive vibes with me. To hear how well I was doing was very reassuring. To know that the time I put into books and my education was looked at in a positive light, was great. I believe she is one of my many reasons as to why I like to read and write. I think unconsciously I wanted her to continue to be proud of my efforts, so I applied myself to reading and writing throughout my life. Gloria Naylor and I are similar in this way. Naylor goes on to write, "But before my sister and I had even attained the age of literacy, my mother would take us on these pilgrimages to the library" (Naylor 227). Gloria Naylor's mother had lived in the South. Being that her mother was black she didn't receive an education, so when her mother had Naylor and her siblings' she went on to move to New York were African-

Americans were opened to an education. That's where the library took play. Naylor's mother had opened a can of worms-in a good way. Naylor was now nose deep in all kinds of books as she states, "I was eager to discover what ever mystery was within the ink upon that paper, because also with in me- and this had to be genetic-was a fascination with the written word" (Naylor 227). Naylor and I both had been lucky girls to have had mothers that taught us the value of reading. Our mothers sharing the wonders between the covers of books, then gave us a purpose to further explore. In those new beginning moments in which we first learned how to read our mission was to search the many possibilities that reading had to offer.

Obtaining a skill requires patience, hard work and a strong will. At times you want to say "To hell with this!" But with those troubling times you've then built strength and learned something new about yourself, and you now hold a new skill. That skill you worked so hard for can now open many possibilities that may have been nonexistent once before. Fredrick Douglass relates to this for he had tremendous hurdles while trying to obtain the skills he then later mastered. At the start of Douglass's Journey to learning how to read and write, he was being taught to read by Mrs. Auld, Douglass's slave 'master's' wife. She soon had stopped teaching Douglass due to the persuasion of her husband Mr. Auld. Douglass restates the words over herd, shared between Mr. and Mrs. Auld, "A n***** should know nothing but to obey his master-to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best n***** in the world" (Douglass 270). Douglass's 'owner' was one of many obstacles he now had to face. Auld was trying to keep Douglass ignorant. Auld had known once his 'property' had held the skills to learn they would now be assessable to comprehend the right and the wrong doings done on to them. Auld was not having that. But, Douglass was not settling for ignorance. Auld's comment had stirred fire upon Douglass's belly. He now knew that reading and writing would reveal all the secrets Mr. Auld- and men like him-held. He goes on to write, "I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty-to wit, the white man's power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom" (Douglass 270). This was the light bulb that flickered over Douglass's head. This was Douglass's drive to learn how to read and write. Young Douglass had devised a plan, to trick the neighborhood boys, preying on their egos by telling these young white boys that he-a black slave-was smarter than them. 'Impossible' I can imagine these young boys saying to Douglass. To these boys it was impossible for a slave to be smart. So, they would flaunt their newly owned knowledge, thinking nothing of it. Little did they know Douglass was soaking up their knowledge like his melanin did the sun. Douglass continued to find numerous clever ways to upskill himself. He wanted break free from the ghostly chains and he wanted to break free from those iron shackles, and reading and writing would do that for him. Like Douglass, I have always had a thirst for knowledge. Every time I came across something new and interesting I'd gravitate to it like a lion turning to an oasis after a long day of vigorous hunting. I remember conversing with people and not knowing exactly what they were talking about, feeling slightly stupid and shamed. I remember an associate of mine would have deep conversations about politics or race. When she spoke on these topics her voice and words would sound assertive of her opinions or 'facts' given. I remember how I would sometimes keep quiet during certain parts of the conversation, knowing that I didn't know much about the genre that was being spoken of. And when I did speak my words would lack the confidence of knowing that my argument had a valid point, because after all my knowledge was just repeated words stolen from someone else's mouth. My facts or opinions getting shot down or belittled with a laugh or a sarcastic remark, bruising my ego black and blue. At those moments I didn't have the knowledge to spit facts at

her opposing argument. I didn't have the knowledge to even know if her 'facts' were merely made up opinions perfectly worded to sound like facts. The lack of knowing had left me vulnerable and ignorant to an interest of mine. Although my judgements on myself were harsh it was a rude awakening for me. I then wanted to educate myself on things I would find myself arguing about, but was oblivious to. I would search and read up on the school curriculum, I'd read up on dogs, and black history. I would simply just read so I could have a conversation beyond the weather or my boring ass weekend. Like Douglass reading gave me the will to know knowledge. Reading showed me topics beyond topic to both talk and write about. Adjacent to Douglass reading and writing had freed me, maybe not in all the ways alike, but in some similar way. Reading had not just opened up my knowledge into my interest, but it had also broadened my horizon, opening me up to new topics, ideas, and new found understanding. Reading and writing had opened me up to knowledge that could be used as solid support in my writing or arguments. I was free to know that if I truly didn't know, a book would help me to know. You know? Douglass and I wanted to understand our surrounding and didn't want to feel or be oppressed due to our ignorance and books, reading, letters, and writing did that for us- it freed us.

I read and I write. I read and I write because those two components have gotten me to where I am today. I am proud of myself. I've gone through high school, technical college, my first semester of university, and just everyday life. Reading and writing did that for me, I did that for me. It's amazing, really. I opened myself up to knowledge and from there I couldn't stop. Now that I know what education, reading and writing can do I want to show that to my sisters. I want them to see what can happen when you invest in yourself. Every word you read aloud is an investment, no one can take that away from you. Knowledge is truly power. I want to be a role model to my sisters like Naylor's mother and mine was to me. I want to show them the beauty in words just as my mom and Naylor's mom did. I want Kami, Shayla, Cheyenne, and Leona to know that if you are willing, reading can bring you to new heights no matter the situation just like Douglass. I want them to be free in their own right just as Douglass was. And I want their voices to be found and used like Naylor's. So, I read and write to get myself to new found heights, to show them that if I can then they can. I read and wrote for many reasons and as I've grown the reasons have changed, but one that will never change is that I read and write for my sisters.

Naylor, Gloria. "The Love of Books." Introduction to College Writing. Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2008: 225-231.

Fredrick Douglass, "How I learned to Read and Write," from Narrative of the life of Fredrick Douglass, An American Slave. Copyright 1987

It's Our Choice Au'sha Ramirez-Quevado

We didn't ask to be on this earth, some random bodies decided to work together and bring forth a human being. Was it for selfish reasons, to see a little hint of himself and herself all in one little body? Was it to be loved unconditionally, but not one thought about the conditions for that promised love? Or was bringing a child into the world an accident? Two consenting adults indulging in one another, not thinking about all the people involved, you, your partner, along with the unexpected life. Nevertheless, we are now on this earth, never given a choice, a choice to choose our care takers, our environment and our skin. We are products of choices made. The *Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore is a book about personal responsibilities and decision making, how your free will to make decisions can affect those around you, as well as your fate for the good or the bad. I certainly find this to be true, for I have had to live with the choices made by others, along with the decisions I've personally made. Yet, just like the character Wes one I've taken responsibility for the actions I've made; if I didn't who knows where I would be today.

The Other Wes Moore by Wes Moore is about two boys who share the same name. Along with the same name these boys have a similar life style, being that they both live in the same neighborhood. These boys are three years apart, and they both don't have a father in their lives. Wes one's father had passed away when Wes one was six years old, leaving young Wes with a few memories. As for Wes two's father, he was an alcoholic, his father did not really care to make an appearance in his life. These young boys came across similar peer pressure, academic struggles, as well as run-ins with the law. Yet as they grew up their identical paths began to change. Wes one became successful, his success, as well as hard work allowed him the freedom to explore new places, people, and learn unbelievable lessons and culture. On the other hand, Wes two's course led him to life in prison for a robbery and a murder. *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore writes about what the world gave these boys to start with and how they used and abused what they had, and if and how they learned from their mistakes.

As children we have little to none independence to make important choices. All of the possible courses of action are up to our care takers. Their decisions being some kind of setup for our future, such selections being permanent examples we may implement in our adult lives. I believe Wes two's father's choice to be a ghost in his life gave Wes two the mind set to not truly care about being a part of his children's lives. Moore assesses this further by stating, "Wes's nonexistent relationship with his father probably contributed to his seeming indifference about becoming a father himself. All he knew was his mom. He had no idea what his role would be in this new situation-he wasn't even sure he had a role" (Moore 100) His dad's lack of responsibility and inability to be a father was a choice, in turn a similar choice Wes Two made. Wes Two being a recipient of a fatherless life style possibly made him think that that life style was the only option. Ultimately Wes became that same man he didn't know. He is now known as a ghost that is never seen and rarely felt by his children, just like his 'father' was to him. Similarly to Wes Two, I grew up with not knowing my father due to his deportation back to South America. Although he was in a different country, he did have the information needed to contact both my sister and I, but he never did. My mom would always say, "Your dad's family has my number, so there's no excuse as to why you guys don't hear from him. I've had the same number for years." My mom was right there is no excuse, if you truly want something or someone you'll take extreme measures to see that you get what you want or who you want, but that was not the case

with my dad. Like Wes Two, I imagined my family with no father, just myself as the head, the tail, and the back bone of the family. My sister Kami and I would talk about how it was unusual to think like that, yet that vision of no father in the home was okay for us. After all who needed a man? Looking at our neglectful dad and incompetent step dad as examples of a "father", we figured fatherless children would be the least of our worries. Later I'd come to realize that a father is what a child needs, both parents is what a child needs. To know who you come from is a great thing to have, to have both parents teach you how to become an adult is a necessity in life. I assume that is why I'm so picky when it comes to men and relationships. I'm aware of the mistakes made and the situation I was brought up in. I had decided I didn't want to relive the same life my parents lived, nor do I want my kids to live the same life I did as a child. The biggest difference between Wes Two and myself is our outlook. Wes two didn't grasp the cause and effect due to his father's mistakes, so he didn't think to do the opposite of his father's actions. As for myself I made it a priority to learn from the mistakes of my parents and others. That little saying, "Children are like sponges" is quite true, unwilling and unknowing they become their surroundings, observing the actions that play out before their eyes. The decision before them becomes an option for the choices they'll make in the future, affecting their path for the positive or negative.

In the book the characters Wes one and two are growing. As they grow they're making rash decisions for themselves, causing their parents to have to choose for them in hopes to get them on the right track. If you were lucky, you may have received an intervention, like the characters and myself. This was apparent for Wes one. He was getting out of hand, he was ditching school, his grades were plummeting, and he was getting caught up by the cops, due to tagging. At this point Wes's mom Joy was getting fed-up, "She was devastated. She was losing her son, and she was not sure how to turn the tide" (Moore 89) Wes's mother finally had chosen to send her son to military school. The move to military school resulted into an attitude from Wes one, then his attitude grew into rebellion. Wes one's strike included disobeying the leading sergeant in his corridor and running away; Wes one had ran away four times within a four day period of being there. Wes's last attempt of running away ended with him getting sent to the office to have a talk with Officer Colonel Batt. After Wes one and the officers conversation, along with a five minute wakeup call-literally-Wes one decided to give the place another shot. Wes one then realized what military school had to offer him, "It was a different psychological environment, where my normal expectations were invert, where leadership was honored and class clowns were ostracized," He had realized that military school was a place where your actions determined whether or not you'll get respect and succeed. This observation gave Wes one a new perspective within his choice making. In like fashion, I was ditching school, running away, and just plain bad. This outrageous behavior of mine added extreme amounts of stress to my mom. In turn she held the same disappointment in me, as Joy did for Wes one. My mom had reached her breaking point. She didn't know what to do with me, so she would confide in my cousin asking for help or suggestions. Later my mom along with my cousin had agreed to send me to California to attend high school there. I genuinely wanted to start fresh and better myself, so unlike Wes one I didn't really have a problem with moving from my home town (Denver). Still after the move, it was hard for me to get used to the new rules and surroundings I was now in. Yet, I must say the new high School in Lakeport, Ca and living with my well educated, older cousins Diana and her husband George gave me a new outlook on life. I had learned to be more open to people. My cousins showed me what getting an education could get you: a well off job, allow you the freedom to travel, and they also taught me that learning new things could open up

door to multiple worlds with in this one. As I lived in California, also realized what I didn't want to implement in my life which was the lack of morals, a small minded mentality toward different people, and their cultures. Similar to Wes one's new outlook on his new environment, too came to terms with my actions. I became aware of the choices made, and how my actions weren't matching where I was, and how my action weren't allowed where stayed. If it wasn't for both Wes one's mother and mine stepping in when our judgement was cloudy, our perception of life may have never changed for the better. Even as we grow old enough to know wrong from right and are able to choose our action we still need someone's help at times to guide us to a less destructive path. The guidance of other can be a great thing, but it is ultimately up to us to choose whether or not we want to work toward improving ourselves, or hinder ourselves from growth.

Becoming an adult is becoming one hundred percent responsible for yourself, which includes all that you do. There isn't always going to be someone to catch you when you fall. There's not always going to be someone to correct your mistakes, especially as an adult. As you become independent in all aspects of the word, you now must tread carefully within your decision making. Wes one found this out when he attend military school his high school year. Wes one along with his friend Dalio had decided to leave Campus for a bite to eat. In the middle of their excursion they came across a couple of people in a car, who seemed to be under the influence of liquor, so Wes one and Dalio ignored these people and went about their business. Soon after the run in with the drunken fools, Wes as well as his friend became a moving target for the people behind the wheel. Once again Wes and Dalio brushed it off and continued to move toward their desired destination. To both Wes one and Dalio's surprise the guys in the car were sitting and waiting for them. Before they even noticed the ambush, one of the drunks in the car threw something hard at Wes's face, causing his tooth to become loss and his mouth bloody. Along with the violent act came an obscene remark, "Go home n*****!" Wes one truly wanted to react-who could blame him- yet he decided against it. The author goes in to depth as to why Wes one withheld himself from retaliating, "... I had to let this go. I had to look at the bigger picture," "... I thought about my mother and how she would feel if this escalated any further. I thought about my father and the name [Watende-meanig "revenge will not be sought"] he chose for me" (Moore 121). With those thoughts Wes one and his friend had quickly made a detour back to their school. Wes one was extremely head strong and wise when he made the decision to turn the other cheek. He not only thought about the long term effects his choice to retaliate would bring, but he also thought about the people involved, those who put their energy into his wellbeing. He also put aside the teachings of the Bronx Streets, acknowledging that what they taught did not apply to him nor the situation brought to him. He ignored the stereotypes of what a black man or any man should do in a situation like his-to fight back, but fight twice as hard. The fact that he thought about the outcome and the people he may effect, because of his actions made him a man. In an ironic, sad way I can relate to this situation Wes one was in. During my attendance at the high School in California, came across a lot of students who were ignorant toward race. One day in particular, I had happened to hear an female student say, "I rather be broke than black." She had repeated herself to my face twice, but I decided to ignore her-I tried. Throughout the school day all I kept hearing in my head was her words, feelings of shock, hurt and embarrassment due to the fact that I didn't do anything filled my thoughts. So I devised a plan, I was going to fight her on the school bus. My plan was successful, she had gotten a bloody nose, and she was now hurt, and embarrassed as much as I was. After the altercation I had gotten sent home (my cousins places). Within that same day I had received some advice from my

cousin's husband. He was telling me about how he had come across racial situation in the military and responded how I had acted, then went on to say, "You can't fight everyone who disrespects you." My cousin's sound advice had come too late. Unlike Wes one, I didn't think about the outcome of my actions before acting upon them, but when I did it was too late. My decision lead me to get suspended, which defeated the purpose as to why I was living in California. I was there to better myself, yet my actions said different. I didn't think of what would have happened if I didn't come out of the fight on top. I was too busy being worried of proving to everyone that this black girl didn't take no shit-like a black girl "supposed" to do. I didn't want to look weak, nor did I want her to get away with what she said. I let expectations of what "strong" looked like rule my actions. I let limitations of how should be and act limit my options on how I could've better handled the situation. Wes one and chose different ways to handle the disrespect thrown at us. This obviously led to different end results. The choice Wes one made didn't set him back or drastically change his path, as for me the situation put a hold on my education. Nevertheless, one thing we both learned is once you free yourself from the chains of society's pressure on how you should be, that is when you become an adult.

Life is not as simple as just black and white, there are grey areas. Our choices being a part of the grey area at times, whether our choices were made because of where we are from, the people that play the role as an example, or maybe we simply didn't know better at that moment. Nonetheless, the reality is no one will take the time to understand why we make the choices we make. When we grow older the tolerance of another's understanding will wear-thin. Our excuses or our reasoning for our choices will no longer matter. In result our second chances will dissipate, no longer having a safety net in which we had at the start of our unrequested journey in life. All you have is the great and failed examples and the lessons learned to influence the choices made, said early on in this essay, "It is ultimately up to us to choose whether or not we want to work toward improving ourselves, or hinder ourselves from growth." firmly stand by this. At the end of everyone's day our world revolves around our choices. The child you tuck in bed every night was created due to a choice, the job you clock-in at was due to a choice, and the people you hang around was due to a choice. Granted there are obvious elements in our lives that we had no say in, but it is up to use to make the decision on whether or not will make our set back in life be just that, a setback. In *The Other Wes Moore* it is clear that the ultimate factor in these men's lives was their choices and no one else's. These men started at the same line in the race of life, yet one gave up and the other prevailed. Wes one made the choice to beat all odds and to change his strategy in life, when the race was looking bleak. As for Westwo, he failed to see that finish line and called it quits. No one "great" became great by not running the race of life, they became great by enduring the race of life. The greats made the choice to push and persevere, no one chose from them. No one chose for me. And no one will chose for you. Ultimately our actions and our choice of actions is up to us

Moore, Wes. *The Other Wes Moore*. New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2011. Print.

Whale Watching Trip in Massachusetts

Cheyenne Reid

The boat is drifting and bobbing along several miles out on which seems to be a lonely ocean, and there I was feeling like shark kibble. The Atlantic Ocean is comprised of saltwater and is quite warm when compared with other oceans, providing ideal conditions for a host of diverse animal species including the humpback whale. Seeing these majestic creatures one summer living happy, wild, and free in Cape Cod Bay and along Stellwagen Bank, gave me the ability to assess nature and have an experience of a lifetime.

While visiting my brother in Massachusetts one summer, we decided to go whale watching on the Atlantic Ocean. Boarding started around 11:30 a.m. on Town Wharf in historic Plymouth, which is best known for its pilgrim story, and one of the country's most iconic landmarks – Plymouth Rock. Before departing around noon, we met our adventurous captain in his crisp white uniform and short white beard as we boarded Captain John's seafaring tour boat early one sunny August Saturday morning. We settled in on the upper deck hoping for the perfect spot for viewing the breathtaking scenery knowing it was going to be a two-hour ride to get to our destination. Mrs. Krill, a naturalist on board answered questions and narrated by telling of the whales, marine wildlife and history of the harbor. After leaving the docks I took a picture of a lone lighthouse that set up high above the shoreline and stood tall as a visible light to mariners for warning them of obstructions, and marking the harbor. A little further out was Provincetown, the first actual landing of the pilgrims on the Mayflower that they ruled uninhabitable after confrontations with the local Indians.

In fact, Cape Cod Bay stretches out in all directions, with its waters glittering under an azure sky. The day was so remarkable with the heat and humidity on land giving way to perfect comfortable temperatures for the whole trip on the glassy calm waters. As we were riding further and further away from shore and looking all around, all I could see was a large body of water as I breathed in the salty ocean air. The feeling of seeming so small compared to this vast body of water, is the same feeling I felt when I first stepped onto the campus of Missouri Western State University. The feeling of being so insignificant entering a new school of such an immense size was almost distressing. The experience seemed to make me put my life into perspective by seeing all living things no matter how big or how small have a purpose; nothing is inappreciable.

When out in the ocean there is always a rocking back and forth of boats, I wanted to hang on to something while walking around. All at once we heard the guide announce, "Whale sighting on the port side." The captain turned off the boat so we could watch and take pictures of the whales feeding on krill. Everyone pulled out their cameras in hopes of capturing treasured photos of this mystical moment. The guide told us, "Listen for the tell-tale exhale of the whale before it surfaces." The whales were so close; we could undeniably smell their breath which is the essence of dead fish. The smell was horrible and the experience wonderful, at the same time. Just seeing a 45 foot, 80,000-pound animal leap clear of the water's surface is spectacular. This tour was magical! To observe any animal in its actual habitat is remarkably phenomenal. To see a humpback whale up close as well as being able to see the symbiotic relationship between them and marine birds simply taking advantage of the fact that the whales' feeding technique provides such an abundance of their favorite food, was incredible. The captain did an excellent job of anticipating the whale's actions and kept the boat in range for viewing at multiple angles.

While standing on the starboard side of the boat, a huge humpback came swimming along next to me. The guide again made an announcement over the speaker, “Do not reach over the rails to touch the whale.” As it swam it seemed undisturbed by the boat. I could see the water running off its wet black skin swimming alongside of the vessel. There were two blowholes located near the top of the head moving as it would spout or breathe through them. This was not a zoo; they were not behind glass or fencing, and the humpbacks do not perform in the wild on command. It was so close that I could have reached out and stroked him, and then all of a sudden he decided to go under the boat only to come up on the other side. Humpbacks usually travel in large, loose groups or pods, and this one had about 15 in its group, and they were very acrobatic. I saw several breaching high out of the water only to slap the water with their fin as they come back down. Sometimes they would twirl around while breaching. It seemed as though they were putting on a show just for us. I loved it!

Consequently, to appreciate the true actual beauty of these magnificent creatures, they need to be able to live out their lives in their natural habitat. This trip was nothing short of awe-inspiring! Feeling small in size and unimportant was only the first step in finding my self-worth. We as humans may have dominion over the animals, but that is a huge responsibility. We are all in some way connected in life, and are all responsible to some point for each other. In addition to seeing these giant mammals up close in their natural environment was more than I hoped for. This was truly Mother Nature at her very best.

Be a Complete Person

Bingxin Song

A competition of Go between AlphaGo and Lee Sedol attracted the world's attention between 9 and 15 March 2016 because it was artificial intelligence versus human intelligence, which had huge significance for human beings. AlphaGo is a computer Go program developed by Google DeepMind while Lee Sedol is an 18-time world champion, one of the world's best Go players. The final result was that AlphaGo won all but the fourth game, which meant the human representative lost to a computer program on the whole. In fact, this is not the first time that artificial intelligence defeated a man, so what's the purpose of education when computers can replace humans to work, and we can find any information online? Russell Baker's article took me into further thinking. Russel Baker, a Pulitzer Prize winner for distinguished commentary, wrote "School vs. Education," in which he notes what's wrong with Schools and education today, and I cogitated them combined with my own experiences. I conclude that parents should guide their children to act properly, schools should cultivate students' skill sets instead of exam skills, and education should aim at developing people's Sound personalities. This thinking process helps me understand the parental and formal education I received and strengthens my determination to be a good learner and a good educator for my future children.

Parents should have good influences on their children through instruction in proper behaviors. In "School vs. Education, Baker states the bad impact on children from parents. He says, "From watching his parents, the child, in many cases, will already know how to smoke, how much soda to mix with whiskey, what kind of language to use when angry, and how to violate the speed laws without being caught" (225). Children haven't formed the ability to judge right and wrong, and parents are the closest people to children. They would like to mimic their parents' behaviors, especially bad ones because those are much easier to act. It's easy to know parents morals through children's behavior because children are the reflection of their parents, which we call upbringing. If a child acts politely in front of others, his parents must be very polite. In contrast, a rude child's parents must be very rude. Additionally, the improper interaction between parents will affect the child's inner growth.

Parents quarreling in the child's presence is a common phenomenon, which badly hurts the child's heart. When I was a little girl, my dad was neither a competent father nor a considerate husband, so my mom always quarreled fiercely with dad while I was present. The quarrels seemed endless each time, and I was in deep fear and worried about Mom getting hurt. These experiences did harm to my physical and mental growth. I definitely knew that my mom was never willing to hurt me, and I could understand that it was hard for her to control her temper under so many despairing circumstances. However, I tried hard to cure the pain of my heart. I still haven't got rid of the sense of insecurity, and I am afraid of hearing other's quarrels now. The influences from parents are intense, and most negative impacts cost children's entire lives to correct, so it's necessary for the young generation to realize the importance of being responsible parents. We should learn to play positive roles in children's lives, behaving properly and dealing with conjugal relationship perfectly, to cultivate the next generation with good manners and healthy mental world.

The function of schools is guiding students to master skills and form their unique characters. In "School vs. Education," Baker tells readers that schools mainly train students for testing. He concludes with, "The point is to equip the child to enter college" (225). It's an

undeniable fact that schools focus on improving students grades for entering good universities, which makes teachers have to only teach and emphasize the points appearing on exams. The students who work hard and do well on exams gain teachers' attention and praise. Those who act badly in study will be ignored or disliked, which hurts students' emotions deeply. China has the typical examination-oriented educational system. My life was filled with study and exams during my formal education. I kept studying in and after School, and I also needed to practice more difficult exercises at the teachers' homes on the weekend, which made me exhausted and left no time nor energy to develop my interests and create meaningful memories. Students accept information passively every day and cannot speak with their voice because the right answers of exams are specific. An obvious problem for me was that I could not come up with creative ideas when I needed to design a project or analyze works because my brain was restricted to a fixed thinking model. It's impossible to make breakthroughs in technology and academia if all the people hold similar thoughts and only come up with similar ideas. At present, no one can memorize more information than computers and calculate faster than them, but it's humans that invent computers and write programs. Schools should develop students' creative and critical thinking, equip students with skills to solve difficulties, and help students form distinctive perspectives to view problems. I cannot change my formal education, but I can make a contribution to the school education. My dream is to be a teacher, and I will devote myself to guiding students to form the ability to learn new information and solve problems. The educational system will be in our young hands in the near future, so it's our duty to cultivate the next generation who can think independently and have great skills to deal with their lives instead of being "excellent" studying machines in colleges.

The essence of education is to cultivate complete people who can adapt to the Society, control their emotions, and create their own lives. In "School vs. Education, Baker holds the view that people don't get real education during the formal and college education. He points out in the end, "Afterwards, the former student's destiny fulfilled, his life rich with Oriental carpets, rare porcelain, and full bank accounts, he may one day find himself with the leisure and the inclination to open a book with a curious mind, and start to become educated" (226). A lot of students don't know their direction in life, and they choose the major following the trend of society, parents' opinions, or someone else's advice. They graduate successfully and find jobs with good salaries, but they are always confused with who they are, what they want, and why they are not satisfied with their lives. They may start to discover the answers through books, wise people, travelling, etc. When they know more about themselves and the World, they realize they are able to change their original life. In fact, I chose my first major as mathematics for education because adults told me that this major was easy to find a stable job, though I had no passion for teaching mathematics. Fortunately, I found my passion through reading books about spirituality, literature, and society. I followed the teaching of a book named *Meet the Unknown Self*. I knew how my body produced negative emotions, and I learned how to control them. I also gradually understood the meaning of life, and knew how to follow my heart and view society properly. I found I was eager to study human minds. I hope I can teach people how to live happily and meaningfully someday, so I determinedly started to learn psychology from the basics. It's a long journey to discover the unknown parts of myself, but I will persist in knowing myself and pursuing the life I desire. We should be good learners to actively get educated through life. Life could be an excellent educator, depending on how we take advantage of it to become mature and capable. Let's keep nourishing our mental Worlds by reading, communicating, and practicing to be complete people.

In my opinion, education is a process to help people grow up. As long as we become better through anything, we get educated. The scope of education is wide, and education is a durative process, so we should not limit ourselves to education only from parents and schools. We should not stop getting educated after leaving homes and schools. Because of continuing learning, I form my own value System, and I can view and understand parental education and formal education objectively. I have the determination to become an insightful and mature person as well as a good educator for the next generation through education. Parents should act properly to shape their children into good behaviors and characters. Schools should equip students with skills to lead good lives and promote social progress. We also should make the best of resources around us to improve ourselves. No matter which kind of education it is, the ultimate purpose of education is to cultivate a complete person. Blaming educational systems or parents doesn't change anything. What we should do immediately is improve ourselves to make contributions to education and benefit human kind.

Baker, Russell. "School vs. Education." Introduction to College Writing. Sixth Edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. 2016. 224-226.

He and I Chayata Thammarat

Reading and writing have been in human society for a long period of time. People needed to write in order to record their histories so their descendants will not repeat the same mistakes. To understand those records, people needed to know how to read. As times passed, reading and writing turned into daily behaviors. However, people no longer see the importance of literacy and literature. Some even got bored or disliked reading and writing, without knowing how these simple behaviors of reading and writing could benefit and improve their lives. Frederick Douglass wrote "*How I Learned To Read And Write*" to show the importance of literacy to his life and how it will be useful to readers as well. As Douglass was a black man removed from his homeland to be one of the slaves for white men, having knowledge and knowing how to read and write would help him escape from this slavery. For people, nowadays, reading and writing seem to be less important compared to Douglass's life but if we look carefully we recognize easily how reading and writing allowed us to be in school, college or university, graduate, were able to know about our environment and other places in the world, get jobs, gain money and support our lives' expenses and many more. Without knowing how to read and write, our lives would end up on the side of the road; not knowing what or how to deal with this lives, working under other people's control and being overworked or underpaid. When I read this story, I recalled how my life has shifted to a better position because of my knowledge in English. I escaped from a place that would teach me how to memorize but not learn; and if I did not learn, I knew I would have to work under other people's control for the rest of my life.

For second language learners, it is hard to read and write as there are different ways of writing and reading for different languages. Native speakers might be able to say, "Write like how you talk" but for second language learners, their mind got stuck at how they talked in their own languages which could be something the English native speakers might not know. It is even harder, if the second language learners were to learn by themselves without a teacher's guiding. Douglass and I started off similarly as we both had someone to teach us once but soon lost our teacher for different reasons. For Douglass, he lost his teacher as his mistress because she was forbidden by her husband or Douglass's master from teaching him literature. Douglass wrote:

Very soon after I went to live with Mr. and Mrs. Auld, she very kindly commenced to teach me the A, B, C. After I had learned this, she assisted me in learning how to spell words of three or four letters. Just at this point of my progress, Mr. Auld found out what was going on, and at once forbade Mrs. Auld to instruct me further, telling her, among other things, that it was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read (Douglass 270).

Because Auld and other white men did not want their slaves to be smarter than them and get out of their control, people at that time wouldn't teach Douglass or black men how to read and write. Auld and others wanted to keep themselves higher and gained all benefits from black men on their own without caring how their slaves would feel. Even Douglass was young at that time and Auld might have thought that Douglass would not be able to understand his words but Douglass took those words into his head and soon figured out why he and others were forbidden to learn how to read and write. If black men knew what was happening in their lives and what rights they could have had were taken away by these white men, they would not be happy and break out of control which would result in white men losing their workers for their own good.

Similar to Douglass, I was prevented from learning by the education system. When I was in nursery school, I had teachers who taught me A to Z and some three letters words. In my primary school years, I had teachers who taught myself three to four letter words. However, hiring native English speakers cost more than hiring teachers who English is their second language, so after my first year of primary school, British and American teachers were replaced by second language learners that made mistakes as they taught. For example, they had difficulties pronouncing some words, get different answers than in the text books and failed to answer my questions or give explanation sometimes. Even though I still had teachers for English classes-I did not fully trust the lectures given by teachers but I trusted the books because they were made by English native speakers. The same way Douglass learned by reading books himself-I also learned by reading the books ahead of each class.

If a person had a support system, he or she could do better in anything they were working on. What if they were prevented instead of supported? There were and would be times when people didn't want others to be smarter than them. Not everyone wanted others to be as smart as or better than them, and not everyone wanted to be under other people's controls. To escape from the control meant needed to be smarter; to be smarter had to come from learning more than others; to be able to learn more than others required better in reading and writing skills. Douglass and I were prevented from learning. For Douglass, his master prevented him from learning as he stated his master's words:

If you give a nigger an inch, he will take an ell. A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master-to do as he is told to do. Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now, if you teach that nigger how to read, here would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It would make him discontented and unhappy (Auld 270).

To his master and white men, losing their slaves because their slaves knew better to be under their control was not a pleasant thing to happen. But for Douglass, it would be a big change to his life and others' as he stated, "That which to him was great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn" (Douglass 271). These quotes showed how Douglass's had no support system like how most students today did. He didn't have a family member who could teach him, people around him were preventing him from learning and the only thing he had to escape from this slavery was himself.

Similar to Douglass who was prevented to learn about literacy, I was prevented to learn about every subject I had in school. I had teachers for classes such as Thai, English, Science, Math, and History but we were taught to memorize the material than understanding it. Memorizing would not shape young people into smart adults but robots with more memories cards. Most teachers I had would scold or mock students who asked questions or were unable to answer the questions. The exams were the same as 'review' sheets students got from each teacher. These are the two main reasons why most of Thai students grew up shy and lacked confidence; resulted not just shy and quiet people but people who had no knowledge. Students were taught to remember by remembering answers and questions from the review sheets and were unable to understand as they won't get answers from asking teachers and were shamed by asking questions. Elders knew about this broken education system but no one made any action to change. My life too would not change if I didn't experience a different education system in

Michigan when I was a sophomore in high school. After I studied in U.S. for a year, I went back to my home country with more confidence and saw nothing wrong with asking questions. One day when I was a senior in an international high school, I accidentally got involved in a conversation about our country's politics. I got a chance to ask a teacher I trust, "Why we knew our education system taught students to remember and not to learn, yet no one come out to make any change, not any little?" My teacher sat there silently for few seconds and replied, "Because there were those who did not want others to be smarter than them. If there are people who were smarter than them then they will lose control of many things and lose the benefits they could get from others." I changed my mind from applying to one of the Thai's universities to one of the U.S.'s right away for my own sake. Students who were taught to remember mostly would forget what they were taught after the final exam and would be unable to use what they were taught in their real lives. I did not want to be one of them and be under others' control so I used my experiences in Michigan as a credit and applied for one of the universities in Missouri.

What could second language learners do if there was no teacher and they were also prevented by situation from learning? Other than losing hope and giving up, they could use the first thing they always had-themselves and then come up with ways to improve this learning process by searching for more resources such as books or people around them. After Douglass knew how important it was to know how to read and write, nothing could stop him from learning how to read and write. He wrote, "The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell" (Douglass 272). He came up with plans to escape from his miserable life by exchanging pieces of bread with people in his neighborhood as he stated, I used also to carry bread with me, enough of which always in the house, and to which I was always welcome; for I was much better off in this regard than many of the poor white children in our neighborhood. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me more valuable bread of knowledge (Douglass 272). Douglass' s life changed more and more as he gained more knowledge and with his intelligent he was able to tricked those around him into his teachers. Even he knew how this could put his life to an end, still he struggled for his better life.

I saw how he taught himself how to read and write was the same way I did when I was in middle school which gave me scholarship to study in U.S. for one year as an exchange student. In my primary school, I was able to guess correctly how to read words in the text books by mainly looking at a, e, i, o, u and letters behind those vowels. By watching other students' mistakes and teachers' corrections gave me better ideas of how to read. I was lucky to always be able to read everything correctly when it was my turn to read. Every times when there were words I don't know, it was always someone else's turn to read. I felt sorry for others as they lost their confidence in reading and learning English but I gained more confidence. I noticed how foreign teachers never complain when we made mistakes and how they always welcome us to ask them questions even though sometimes they couldn't answer. Soon after picking up words by listening to teachers talking to one another and through reading, I was able to say longer sentences. Foreign teachers misunderstood that I was the best student in the class and started asking me questions such as how to say words in Thai, what event was being held by the school, ways to go to each specific place, where were my classmates and more. Because they slowly approached me, I answer them easily by using "Yes" and "No" at the very beginning of our relationships. Soon, they asked longer questions and luckily I was ready. My classmate's started to drag me along to be a translator for them when they needed to talk with foreign teachers. Thai teachers also asked me to translate their works into English and would drag me along when they

needed to talk with foreign teachers as well. By helping out foreign teachers, I gained help in return. Especially when the first teacher from the U.S. arrived to our school to teach us science and math in English. He was told by previous foreign teachers that I was one of very few students in my grade who could communicate in English and had helped them out many times so he reached out to me too. Other than gaining experiences and using my second language that gave me a scholarship to America, I also used every single foreign teacher as my tutor. Because I helped them out with their lives in Thailand-they decided to help me out with my other classes' lectures in exchange. During break, I would bring questions I had to ask foreign teachers instead of Thai teachers. Even it was not for their classes, foreign teachers were answering all my questions and even conversed with me in person sometimes. It was a huge change like how Douglass moved to another family and learned more by himself. In Michigan, I picked up words by listening and imitating people as they talked to one another. I might not know the exact meaning or the expression of every word but I knew when to use them. Now, I am in Missouri, picking up more words from where I left behind in Michigan, approaching the goal in my life→ the same way Douglass was.

Frederick Douglass's life story from "*How I Learned To Read And Write*" and my own story showed our struggle in learning English. We realized how important this mother language is and how it can change our lives. From A, B, C to three to four syllable words, lost our teacher and struggled to learn by ourselves, used everything possible around ourselves to teach us and moved to a better place showed that for everyone, reading and writing could be more than just to communicate. It would lead to better position in our lives as well. Therefore, the first and second language learner must not give up along the way or be careless about it. No matter how much struggles or obstacles we have to face. Everyone can overcome by keep practicing and use those around us as tools for our own benefits. People, especially the native speakers could give the most benefit at this point. Unlike me or Douglass who learned mostly by ourselves, the native speakers should be proud and care more of their language. Meanwhile, just like me and Douglass, those who are second language learners shouldn't give in to the obstacles in their lives and English. Parents, siblings, cousins, books on the shelves, Google, mobile phone, teachers and even strangers can teach you something you never know or think of. If you think your hard work hasn't paid off, work harder and more often. Everything changes over time. Be positive and keep walking, like my favorite quote, "Walker".

Douglass, Frederick. "*How I Learned To Read And Write*" *Introduction to College Writing* Boston McGrawhill Companies, Inc, 2010: 270-276

A Place of My Mind

Chayata Thammarat

On a long journey, travelers would want to find a peaceful place to put their heavy back pack down and rest. Life is also a long journey that walks together with the time and never stops. My life is indeed full of journeys and new experiences. However, for almost twenty years I haven't found a place that I could rest without duties or thoughts of who I should be on my shoulders. After I arrived at Missouri for university, I found a simple looking pond that would seem to have nothing special about it but soon became a significant place of mine.

Living in a different country is not as easy as just changing the place. Homesick would make a visit once in a while as well as the thought of grandmother who just got sick right before I left my home country. In Missouri Western State University, some people gave me a long stare because I am not black nor white but Asian. Some people forced their ways into my life out of nowhere because the first thing they see in me is Asian, which seemed to be rare creatures from their dreams. Once I was asked if I am feeling low because I'm not majority but minority. At first, I'm confused of what they mean, but soon I realized that it's not a nice feeling to have someone just stare at you.

Adjusting to a different language, culture, place, and people is a big work. Still, classes and homework are also what I have to deal with. I feel dumb, slow, maybe unconscious when some people talk to me like they were rapping non-stop, and there is nothing I can do except keep listening and try to catch millions of new words into my brain, even if it would make me exhausted but I needed to do what I have to do. As a nature lover, I prefer a quiet place once in a while. However, I couldn't find anywhere, until I arrived in Missouri. It's a simple looking pond with nothing special to be excited about. Yet, this place became my favorite place as I can shut myself away from everything, rest, and feel at ease. The more I visit this pond, the more I like this place.

Trying to get away from all of the negative feelings, I forced myself to be focused on the assignments given by teachers. People could say that your own room is a perfect place to study. However, not my room in Vaselakos Hall. My roommate rarely talks to me or others except for her friend from the same country. Since the very first day, she started bringing a friend in and they would be chatting in their language all day or all the time that they are in the living room. Later, they started to watch something without using earplugs, talking and chatting in the bed room which is right next to mine, preventing me from getting some rest, doing homework and even preparing for the exam. My roommate leaves the window open sometimes and let some insects in, but the worst is how they talk loudly all day long. Even the thick wall and heavy door couldn't prevent noises from reaching me. My room is no longer a place I can take a break from society. I would walk around the campus or go play basketball just for fun in order to escape from noises and stresses from work. Not knowing what to do, I kept walking around pointlessly, until a day I found a significant place.

Other than keeping myself busy, animals are magical creatures for me. They can drive stresses, uncomfortable feelings and worries away from my head. They know well how to make themselves look dumb and funny just to cheer me up when I'm feeling down. They don't have a complicated language system like humans, but they can communicate well enough for me to make a guess. Other than giving us knowledge, animals are our medicines, food, friends, family and they play important roles in the environment; everywhere on earth needed organisms to keep

the balance of nature. I felt in debt as they gave us a lot of benefits, yet we treat them like monsters or criminals, especially wild animals. All of our actions are because they look different from us. For example, they can't stand on two legs, can't create multiple sounds to make differences between words, can't create technologies for themselves, can't use a gun, etc. While they have claws, teeth, beaks and some other mechanisms to protect themselves, we have guns and many other weapons to terminate one's life in one second. This way, I'm in fear of human more than animals. As long as I watch animals' warning signs carefully, I believed I will be safe. Before I realized it, I was a part of Zoology major and traveled to Missouri for Missouri Western State University because Thailand didn't have one major that I could guarantee my future career. Also, because Missouri has more forest around than Thailand's university, I chose to travel around rather than staying still and studying from the books only.

After trying to get an on-campus job because International Students are not allowed to do off-campus job, one of my friends suggested a place for me called the "Conservation Department" after he knew how much I love animals and nature. I walked there, and soon I arrived to a building that has an information on the door that said, "Office Hours Are: 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m." and then listed, "Monday Thru Friday Except For Holidays". I look down to my watch said, "5:58". I roll my eyes and take a peek through the window using my hands to block away the light. By doing so, it chases away the reflection on the glass of the door. I saw a snapping turtle in a tank, standing up on both back legs and stretching its head out to take in some air from above the water. I look at it for a while until it has got some air into the lung and getting back down on its four legs again.

I give up on looking for someone who might allow me inside and start walking back to the hall's direction, thinking I would have nothing to do again today since classes just started. Suddenly, a strong wind like a storm blew from behind and almost made me fall as one of my feet is in the air. I couldn't help but look back, then I saw a stair that can't be seen from the front side of the Conservation Department. I ignored the wind that keeps coming and blew my hair back and forth like crazy and take a few further steps. There, I saw a pond just like any other pond. The water wasn't clean nor clear but dim, like a dead pond which didn't impress me at all.

I took some steps down to the first tree I saw. Unlike water in the pond, the air is clean and clear. I felt fresh, breathing this air in and would prefer this air than black smoke from cars or pollution from factories. I smell nothing and feel nothing at all in the beginning. The wind blew even harder and the cold gave me chill, but the sun beam that was not too strong gave me some warmth. When the sun beam got too strong, the tree gave me its big shade that I could cool myself down. The shadow casts down and its tip touches on one end of the pond, looking like a fine bridge. As I saw the shadow, I take a few steps down carefully as the soil is very soft after the rain last night. Many insects such as butterflies, crickets, wasps and some other big and small insects that I don't know nor have seen, jump out of the grass before each step I would make. Along the way, dandelions let their babies fly away with the wind, whether they are ready to experience the world or not. A brown humming bird fell down from the tree onto the bush's branch while trying to fly against the wind.

I looked up into the sky as a high sharp voice cried above my head. Soon, it was answered by another similar voice. A black pair of wings spread out, riding on the shapeless and colorless wind while their sharp eyes look for their unlucky prey, which I hope not to see. The frog jumped down into the water, followed after by another on the opposite side of the pond. Whether it was because I stepped down or the hawk's voices, crickets and other insects stop their songs and the party is over. The silence won the competition today with its unique sound. I took

a seat on the bench next to the pond, spotting some signs sticking out of the water, having some plants names on them for the half side of the pond, leaving the other half side of the pond looks clear and natural. The different plants grew randomly and one of them is a plant with purple flowers like lavender, reminding me of lavender's smell that I prefer than any other flowers because it's not too strong or too weak in the nature. A stone stood a little away from the pond freaks me out at first because I thought it is a tombstone. I felt my heart beat faster and faster, so I take a deep breath and slowly focused on what is written on. "Pond 4", and the others next two lines are the words I couldn't understand and some part of it was hidden by some kind of grass that seemed to be a good toy for cats. I could see that both lines started with "M" while the second line start with "M k o t t m b e s" with a short horizontal line above the letter "e", and the third line is "M k o c h m b u s". The last line was written "Wild Pond". The silence stole my heart. My head gets to rest from translating which is a full time job. My ears get to rest from chatting voices of my roommate and her invited friend. My eyes are free from the light of a laptop and phone screen. My hands can relax as no work's coming up. There is no one else other than me and the nature. The voice from nature just spreads around wider than people's voice but it's not directly into my head and just being around it, makes me feel like I didn't need to understand it or remember anything. Letting everything around pass by carelessly, I finally found a place I could take a rest for real.

I keep coming back to this pond when I have free time, whether it's when I'm tired after a walk around campus, just finished my homework, running away from my roommate and her friend's voices or wanting to play with one of the snakes in the Conservation Department. This place didn't require me to be anything or to do anything. This place did not judge me from who I am or where I came from. This place has no open nor close time nor schedule nor plan. This place lets me think of nothing as I've always wanted to do but is hard to succeed in human society. In this place, it's just me and the silence that won't disturb one another, letting the time pass by quietly with nothing on my shoulders to carry

About the Authors

In the Words of the Students' English 100 Instructors

Debra Anderson: I like to think that it was fate that placed Debra in my classroom. I remember just days before the start of the semester, she walked into my office with questions about placement and enrolling in a composition course. Because she missed the placement exam deadline, I informed her she would have to take ENG 100. As we continued to talk, I sensed her intellectual curiosity and her potential. I asked if she would like to enroll in my class – and she did. Debra walked into the classroom with a desire to learn and a life that had already taught her much. Yet, she wanted to learn more. Throughout the semester and all of her papers, she wrote in order to find her voice, to discover her identity and to relate her past struggles and accomplishments to all of her readers. And she has done that –with grace and power. All of her essays deal with the struggle for identity, in using both the past and present to understand that identity and to be proud of it. In her essay, “Why Queer Isn’t a Bad Word,” she interviews her daughter, Brittany, who is bi-sexual, in order to make her readers understand the challenges that her daughters and others in the LGBT community face and dispel misconceptions in order to enlighten all. In her essay, “How Reading Changed My Life,” she writes in response to Sherman Alexie’s essay, “Superman and Me,” and connects to Alexie’s fight to “break down their [Indian children and students] door of fear and apathy.” Throughout the semester, I saw Debra gain confidence and saw her voice shine through in class and in her essays. I realized that she, like Alexie, had broken down her door. And by sharing her journey through her writing, she wants to inspire others to do the same. Debra truly understands the purpose and power of language and writing. And we are all the better for reading her writing. –Dawn Terrick

Anonymous: In her own words, her literacy journey has been a “very long and hard journey.” Yet, that never deterred her. Every day, she came to class with questions to ask, ideas to share and curiosity to quench. At the beginning of the semester, she struggled with sentence structure and academic format. But she never gave up. Instead, she came to my office, seeking my help and even asking for some grammar books to help her. I gave her books and she used them throughout the semester, completing grammar and sentence structure activities. And as the semester progressed, so did her confidence. And with that, she began to write in a more personal and intimate way, of a life that many could not understand but wanted to once they read her essays. I know it was difficult for her to put her life on the page and I commend her for her courage in doing so. I know, through her own stories, she has taught others to not be ashamed, to be strong, to never give up and I hope she has learned that herself. –Dawn Terrick

Nora Cogdill: Nora is the kind of student every teacher wants in her class. She works and raises a family while taking her studies very, very seriously. Nora was a good writer from day one, and she worked to get even better. This essay was eye opening for me. The topic was both personal and public, and Nora used the assignment—write about a person you know who was odd or different—to connect her personal experience with more broad issues of trust and character evaluation. –Stacia Bensyl

Preston Craig: Preston’s writing is raw and powerful. He immediately makes his readers understand that he has something important to say and that they should pay attention.

Throughout the semester, Preston's essays dealt with the struggle of the African American: he wrote of his own obstacles and accomplishments as well as of those throughout history, starting with Frederick Douglass and his essay, "How I Learned to Read and Write," continuing on with the book *The Other Wes Moore* and then connecting these authors and their stories to current events. In class and in his essays, he is not afraid to share his life stories, both harrowing and uplifting and, as a result, he enlivened class discussion and challenged our ways of thinking and responding to the readings and to current events. In the end of his essay, "365 Days a Year," he writes of his desire to become a better father, son, Christian and man and I believe he has. He concludes his essay, "I regret nothing and I'm proud of the route my life has taken." As his instructor, it was inspiring to witness the evolution of his thinking and writing processes and witness the beginning of his journey now to become a better writer as well. —Dawn Terrick

Kelsey Frazier: Kelsey second-guesses everything she writes, but I knew from reading the opening lines of "Days that Repeat" that her work would be selected for the Eng100 publication. Not only was that essay selected, but her essay "Educated Deficiency" was also chosen, which came as no surprise to me. Kelsey has a beautiful writing voice—often, I would pause to reread her lines simply because I was so struck by the descriptive quality of the words. She's a devoted student and a brilliant writer, and I'm happy to be associated with her first (of possibly many) publications. —Brooksie Kluge

Samuel Gouldsmith: If I had to choose one word to symbolize Samuel, it would be *forward*. In every endeavor, whether in work or school, Samuel constantly seeks forward movement. An A on a paper was never good enough for Samuel. He wanted to improve in any way possible, and he did, even when it was in no way necessary for a grade. This commitment led me to ask Samuel to make some final, tiny revisions to a paper so I could present it at a conference in Oxford, Mississippi, and he did it without hesitation. For Samuel, it's not about the grade or the paycheck or the recognition, but the growth, the constant striving to be the best he can be at every opportunity. Samuel's focus on moving forward is evident in his writings, from his growth as a person during Army Medic Training at Fort Sam Houston, to his careful detailing and admiration of his Grandpa Ron's red recliner and its symbolism of continuous progress, and even to Samuel's own continual growth as a reader, emerging from setback at a young age to keep building his own literary castle. I have faith that as Samuel progresses in his career and his studies and his life, he will forever be moving *forward*. —Amy Miller

Scott Jackson: "I know I got an A on this paper, but can I revise anyway?" These words came out of Scott Jackson's mouth after nearly every assignment, so it is no surprise to me that THREE of his essays were published in this edition. Scott is an incredibly hard worker, as evidenced by the quote above, but he's also a deep thinker: when discussing readings in class, Scott offered thoughtful, nuanced viewpoints that no one else had considered. By the end of the semester, Scott was a leader in the classroom—students wanted to be in his peer review group because he was kind but constructively critical, and students wanted to discuss readings with him because he would bring the text into a new light. In all three published essays, pieces of Scott's personality shines through: his kindness, his critical thinking skills, and his desire to continually make his work better through revision. —Brooksie Kluge

Tori Kibbe: Tori is the type of student that keeps educators returning semester after semester. She fully embraced each assignment, writing to express herself and eager to learn new ways to demonstrate her growing abilities. When many students were wary of controversial topics, Tori chose to pursue them headlong, bravely telling their story and helping us learn to better

understand each other. I was constantly impressed by her bravery when it came time to receive feedback on her drafts. She wanted her papers mercilessly ripped apart because she knew that was the best way, for her, to improve her writing. And it worked, Tori pushed her papers beyond mere essays, and she was able to capture the beauty of human experience. –Beth Ann Reinert

Tessa McKinley: In Tessa’s essay, “The Power of Reading and Writing,” she writes, “After going through orthodontic treatments, I realized how great I felt with the confidence of a new, beautiful smile. I decided I wanted to become an orthodontist so I could help others feel confident and beautiful too . . . It’s painful to feel like you can’t have what you most want in life . . . I can relate to the feeling of frustration at being seen as less intelligent.” This statement, in connection to Sherman Alexie’s essay, “Superman and Me,” epitomizes Tessa – a young woman who wants to help others and is determined to do so. From the start of the semester, Tessa worked hard, always participating in class and asking her peers and me for feedback and revising her work. Her commitment paid off as I saw Tessa grow into a confident reader, writer and student. With all that she has learned and accomplished, I am certain she will be able to help others feel confident and beautiful too. –Dawn Terrick

Leah Njoroge: Leah was a joy to have in class because she always had her work done, she always had a thoughtful response or answer to enliven our discussions, and she wrote incredibly interesting papers from the perspective of an international student. Her interview with her uncle is one of the best interview papers I’ve seen in English 100. Even better, Leah is a kind and respectful student who will go far. It was a genuine pleasure to have her in class, and I hope she continues her writing career and continues to share stories about the special life. –Cynthia Bartels

Taylor O’Connor: The best thing about having Taylor in class was his bright and cheerful smile that he wore every single day. That is hard to do for many of us in the morning! It was a pleasure to walk into class every day and have him greeting me with that the smile. Taylor is also a very thoughtful and talented writer. Even though he came to class as a good writer, he worked hard to improve and did so. He never missed one assignment or one day of class, and he put 100% into everything he did. I’m very proud of him for getting three of his papers in the publication and hope he continues to write. –Cynthia Bartels

Au’sha Ramirez-Quevado: The moment Au’sha first spoke in class, I knew I could always count on her to be engaged with the readings and stimulate class discussion. I also knew she was a strong, independent young woman. And this was further illustrated in her essays. Just the titles of her two published essays, “I Do It With a Purpose” and “It’s Our Choice,” illustrate her strength and passion. Her essay, “I Do It With a Purpose,” refers to her reading and writing. As you read the essay, you will find that Au’sha understands the power of literacy and education and is driven to continue her education. And even more important, she wants her younger sisters to realize this as well. She writes, “I want them to be free in their own right just as Douglass was. And I want their voices to be found and used like Naylor’s.” This is a young woman who wants to change and improve her life and the lives of others – and I am confident she will. –Dawn Terrick

Cheyenne Reid: In her essay, “Whale Watching Trip in Massachusetts,” Cheyanne Reid allows us to experience that majestic moment with her when a humpback whale swims close alongside the boat. Her vivid descriptions engage our senses, and her perspective makes us aware of our

human frailty when contrasted with the whale's immensity. Thank you for taking us on this tour, Cheyenne. –Patricia Brost

Bingxin Song: When I first met Bingxin, I thought she was a timid, albeit hard-working student. However, throughout the semester, her confidence grew and she began to express herself more adeptly in both her writing and in class discussions. She pushed herself harder as a writer than even I as her teacher would push her, constantly re-writing and re-writing. I most appreciated her efforts, not because she was interested in a better grade, but because she was interested in learning. As Bingxin expresses in her essay "Be a Complete Person," she fully grasps the concept of learning as a process in which the student is constantly reflecting and improving their efforts to see progress and subsequent need for growth. It was a joy to watch her learn to hone her craft as a writer. –Beth Ann Reinert

Chayata Thammarat: As a non-native speaker, Faye had obstacles that my other students did not face. However, this did not deter her. She steadfastly worked and revised her papers. Over the course of the semester, Faye's writing and language skills greatly improved and she became more confident in her speaking and writing. But, perhaps, my favorite memories of Faye, are when we would talk in my office. Sometimes we would work on her papers but, oftentimes, we would discuss the class readings, especially *The Other Wes Moore*, or events in life or on campus. I always enjoyed this time with Faye. Her questions and insights into the readings were thoughtful. And this thoughtfulness is reflected in her first essay, "A Place of My Mind." In this essay, she reveals that a pond, a place of nature and solitude, right here on campus, was her sanctuary, a place that helped her to escape from pressures and judgements, and to figure out who she wants to be. In her essay, "He and I," Faye compares her struggles with literacy and the American educational system with Frederick Douglass's. It is her keen analysis of freedom and education that make this essay stand out for she realizes that true knowledge and freedom come from struggle and learning how to think for yourself and not allowing others to think for you. –Dawn Terrick