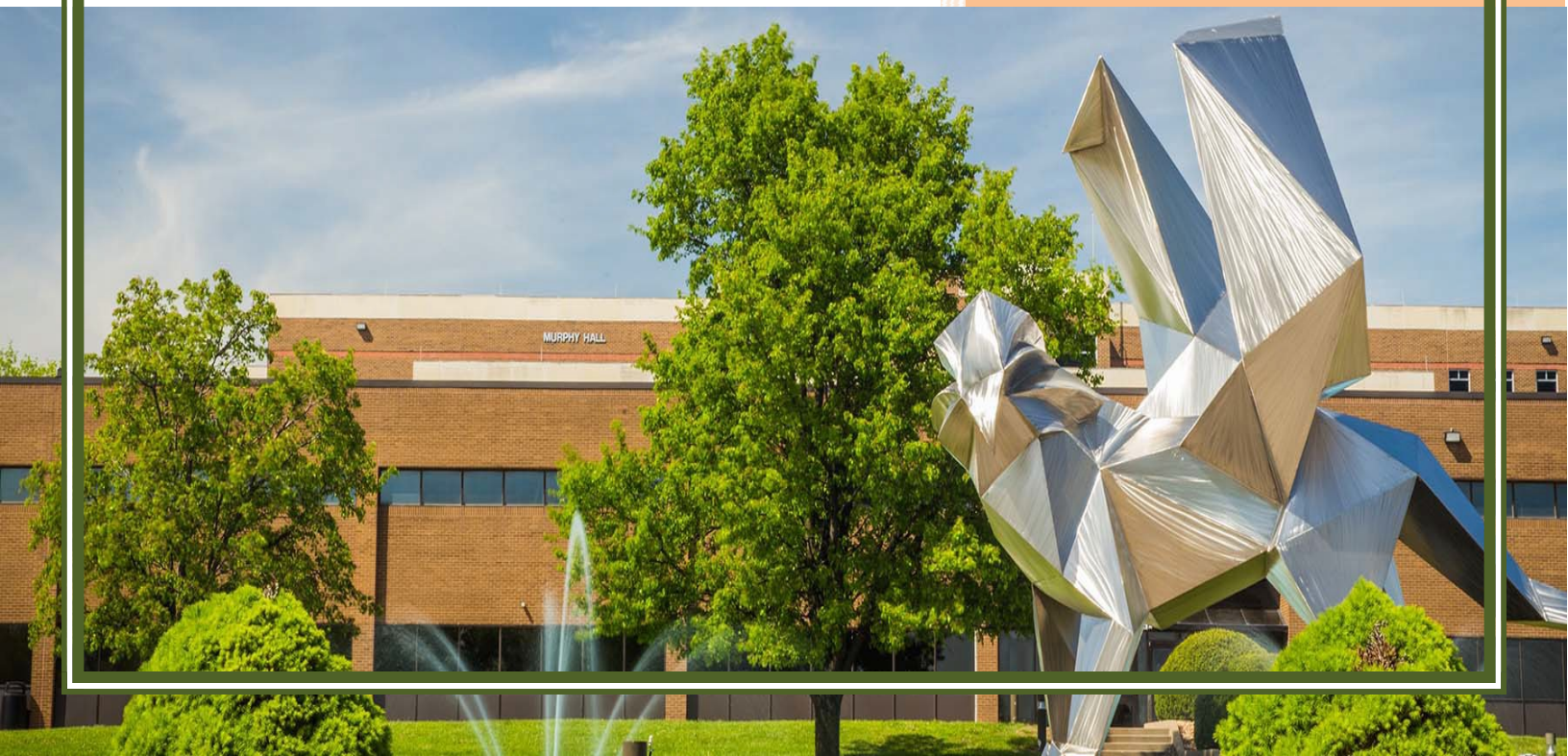


# MWSU

2017/2018

## **Discovering the Student, Discovering the Self**

**ENG 100 Student Essays  
Department of English and  
Modern Languages**



## **Introduction**

### **Dawn Terrick**

“There have been great societies that did not use the wheel,  
but there have been no societies that did not tell stories.”

-Ursula Le Guin

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 2017 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.

Dawn Terrick, Director of Developmental Writing (ENG 100)  
Missouri Western State University  
Department of English and Modern Languages  
English 100 – Introduction to College Writing  
2017-2018



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## *About the Authors*



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



## About the Authors

### In the words of the students' English 100 instructors

**Reed Bolonyi:** Reed was a very enjoyable student to have in class not only because of his enthusiasm and desire to learn, but also because of his unique personal experiences and uncanny ability to blend them into the class assignments. Every day he was there with his work complete and with a handful of questions about how he could continue to improve. His enthusiasm permeated the classroom and his diligence encouraged others. We also should appreciate Reed's understanding of important social issues such as domestic abuse as well as his willingness to expose those issues in hopes of bringing about change. I hope he continues to write with this goal in mind. -Cynthia Bartels

**Jessica Bright:** Jessica Bright is the type of student that writing teachers look forward to having in class. She is always prepared for class and works through the writing process, eagerly looking forward to feedback and opportunities for revision. All aspects of Jessica's participation in class are exemplary, especially collaborating with her peers in workshop and participating in class discussions. I enjoyed helping Jessica structure the passion she felt for her topics combined with her drive to succeed in earning her degree. I wish her the best in all of her future courses. -Beth Reinert

**Kennedy Brock:** Kennedy (Kenny) Brock was an enthusiastic writer and an active class participant. She successfully juggled her course work and her theater work. I am pleased that her essay, which I know means a lot to her, has been included in this collection. -Meredith Katchen

**Dejah Harmon:** Throughout the semester, Dejah would often surprise me with her passion, purpose and insight. During class discussion, in response to Frederick Douglass's "How I Learned to Read and Write," I asked in what ways are we enslaved today and Dejah answered that media and technology enslave us because they act as a barrier to knowledge and keep us from thinking for ourselves. I always looked forward to what Dejah would share with the class. She then developed this meaningful idea for her essay, "My Evolution of Literacy." Dejah works hard, does not take her life or education for granted and acknowledges the importance of our choices. This aspect comes through in her essay "No Matter What, You Can Overcome," where she interviews her friend who survived gun violence in St. Louis. This is a moving and graphic story and, in the conclusion, Dejah writes, "At some point, it's an arduous journey to conquer whatever life throws at you but you just need to have a purpose or to be willing to overcome it." Dejah also makes careful choices regarding her writing and is clearly focused on

learning and becoming a better writer. Because she struggled with the mechanics of writing, she labored over sentence structure and word choice. However, her content is strong and understanding of the readings is perceptive. Always wanting to better herself inside and outside of the classroom, she even asked me for a reading list. I hope Dejah will continue to work hard and surprise all those around her. -Dawn Terrick

**Kelsey Helm:** For Kelsey, her essay, “Gayle’s Life,” is important not because it is an award winning essay, but because the essay allows her to tell the story of her grandmother and the struggle for survival she faced during two abusive relationships. As soon as Kelsey started working on this interview assignment, I could tell this meant more to her than just another English paper. Kelsey showed me multiple drafts and we had meaningful discussions about the paper as well as her grandmother; I always enjoyed our conversations, conferences and emails. At one point, Kelsey returned to her grandmother for a follow up interview so she could write a paper that truly reflected her grandmother – her struggles and triumphs. In this interview essay, the reader learns about Gayle’s tragic experience of being locked in a basement and reads Gayle’s own powerful words that this abusive relationship made her feel “worthless” and “not human.” Kelsey tells us herself that Gayle’s husband was a “controlling and manipulative monster” and writes this essay to reveal this to her readers and how difficult, yet vital, it is to break the cycle of violence. This assignment sparked in Kelsey an intellectual curiosity and a determination to become a better writer. This essay proves that. -Dawn Terrick

**Leona Horton:** Leona walked into my classroom bringing in a troubled long ago past as well as a recent past which planted in her doubts about her ability to write and succeed in college. Yet, throughout the semester and throughout her writing, Leona worked gloriously hard and silenced those voices of her past. In the classroom and in her essays, Leona had the courage to speak of her difficulties so that both she and others could learn and change. In two essays, she wrote about fatherless young black males and the obstacles they face in our society today but then juxtaposed these tragedies with an uplifting story about her grandparents’ farm and the positive family model that is possible. In her most powerful essay, the one published here, she explores the abuse she suffered and confesses, “I didn’t know what peace meant in a home like ours.” She then follows this with explaining how writing saved her: “Thinking about suicide feeling it was my only freedom to peace in my life, until I began writing journals of my life, and the life I deserved. Sometimes I wonder to this day if I never started writing down what was going on in my life would I have survived, what would have happened to me as a teenager who could speak but hid a lot of pain and scars.” Because she found meaning and catharsis in writing, she wants to pass this lesson along to others. She writes, “A lot of teenagers are going through similar situations today and don’t really know what to do or which way to go, when facing abuse, problems in school, home, or either their own inner demons that a lot of adults brush off as a child with no discipline until it’s too late, as then they have taken their lives. Teaching them how to write down things that are hard to say or express can be a way of healing . . . Being able to explain to your children about how reading and writing is more than just educational, and teach them about expressing themselves even if it’s on paper can help relieve painful emotions that can allow you to have a voice or develop a voice. Teaching my own children about writing down their feelings not only gave them their voice but gave them the power to be free from a world where words are not spoken.” Leona’s thoughtfulness and reflectiveness are always evident in everything she does. Although obstacles remain for Leona, she will persevere and prove to those

voices in the past they were wrong. She is an inspiration and I am honored I could be a witness to her success. -Dawn Terrick

**Kayla Johnson:** In her essay “The Starting Point” Kayla Johnson describes the dramatic account of her grandmother’s courage and dedication to a cause during the Civil Rights movement in 1964. Through an interview with her grandmother, Kayla first shows the reader what segregation was like for her grandmother, and then she adeptly takes the reader to a drug store soda fountain counter and shows her grandmother exercising her rights after the Civil Rights Bill is passed. Kayla shows her grandmother’s courage in the face of abuse. Kayla writes eloquently about this important subject and the lessons her grandmother learned and then passed on to her family. This is an extremely interesting essay. -Patricia Brost

**Stephanie Kanjikupa:** Having Stephanie as a student has been one of the most rewarding experiences I have had as a teacher. Although she speaks six other languages, she entered our class after working hard to get her English to a level where she could pass the class and was apprehensive at first about her ability to do so. She continued to work very hard on every single assignment, never missing a day of class or a single assignment, no matter how small. She also works 30 hours a week and raises five young children, so her commitment and energy level are exceptional. The results of her labor are apparent in her essay. What is also special is that she attributes her motivation and work ethic to her father, so the publication of her essay about him is a meaningful tribute to his memory and to his daily influence in her life and those of her children. He would be extremely proud of her. -Cynthia Bartels

**Jerra Merrifield:** Jerra always wants to improve her writing. She was one of the most engaged students in her class; she put much effort into becoming a better writer. That could be because she wants to be a teacher and she understands how important a good foundation in writing is. Jerra’s essay is very personal, yet very universal. Many of us find interviewing someone that we think we know leads us to understand that person from a different perspective. -Stacia Bensyl

**Miranda Merritt:** Miranda Merritt writes honestly and engagingly in her two essays “A Different Path” and “Escaping Reality.” In “A Different Path” Miranda interviews her father and skillfully interweaves his words with hers as she describes his stint in the Navy and the lessons he learned from it. Even more importantly, she tells the reader what she learned from his experience. She says, “I honor my dad for his accomplishments, and I am inspired from his story. Hearing his story motivated me to want to extend my abilities to become something greater with determination and dedication.” In her essay “Escaping Reality” Miranda again captivates the reader with compelling parallels between her life and the lives of authors Richard Rodriguez and Gloria Naylor. Miranda’s intensity of feeling rings true as she describes how reading transported her. She writes, “When I read a good book I am able to picture myself in the story. The world around me pauses for a moment while I step into a different reality.” She also says that writing, in effect, saved her life. She compares her experience to Naylor’s in “The Love of Books.” She writes, “When Naylor describes how reading and writing saved her life, it made me realize that it saved mine as well.” Miranda not only proves her point, but she also proves she is a writer! -Patricia Brost



**Rebecca Miller:** Becca Miller writes vividly and candidly in her essay “How Writing Saved My Life.” In this essay, Becca compares her experience to Gloria Naylor’s. She writes, “As with Gloria Naylor in her essay “The Love of Books,” my demons were very real as I was caught between childhood and adulthood.” Using eloquent and inspired descriptions, Becca first shows the reader her struggles, and then she attributes her survival to her passion for writing. That passion comes through clearly in this essay. She says, “The ability to express my feelings, and to feel validated did, in fact, save my life.” Becca has a desire to pursue a writing life, and I have no doubt that she will find success. Her essay is a must read! -Patricia Brost

**Mijoe Mundungu:** Mijoe Mundungu is a shy student, but has a powerful voice. Her writing is clear and precise, and shows how in touch with humanity she really is. I love reading stories of anticipation and hope, and am thrilled that the English 100 publication has shared my enthusiasm for her expression by including this piece. Mijoe has already proven to be a fine student and will continue to show how special she really is. -Dana Andrews

**Demetrius Pittman:** When I think back to my first conference with Demetrius, as we sat discussing his first Task Paper, I remember telling him that I wanted to know the rest of the story. He gave me a perplexed look, thinking he didn’t have much of a story to tell, but over the course of the semester, Demetrius discovered that he had a lot to say. In the pages of “Defining Literacy,” Demetrius reflects on how our earliest influences shape us, but don’t necessarily define us forever. In this essay, Demetrius shows he does indeed have a story to tell, and he has found the voice to tell it, defining himself as a writer and proving his claim true: we are not our pasts; we are who we choose to become. -Amy Miller

**Taylor Ramsey:** Taylor was a dedicated student who came to class with a smile on her face and was always willing to work hard as well as help others. Throughout the semester, she effectively used her personal experiences to enhance her work as well as paid tribute to her home and family for their positive influences. Although her work throughout the semester was at a high standard, she excelled in her last essay about her own journey to literacy. Her essay not only reflects her dedication and skill, but once again serves as inspiration to others and is a tribute to her upbringing. I am sure Taylor will continue to develop her writing and to excel at anything she puts her mind to. -Cynthia Bartels

**Karla Schumate:** As often happens, Karla Schumate—being a non-traditional student—expressed reservations about her writing, when she entered my English 100 class. This first task paper seemed to calm the fear and allow her to express herself fully, showing love and reverence for a part of her childhood. Karla excelled as the semester progressed and subsequent task papers showed an ease with, yet a command of, the written word. I loved reading her work. -Dana Andrews

**Abe Scott:** Abe Scott does not consider himself a model student nor did he ever expect to be earning accolades at university, but he is. He combines life experiences and work ethic in stunning, relatable prose. His style as a developing writer is both conversational and educated. It was a pleasure to have him in class as I could always look forward to his positive contributions and comments in our discussions. I am confident he will continue doing well in school and setting an example for his own children. -Beth Reinert

**Julia Thompson:** Every morning as my students walked in and settled down for class, Julia would be sitting at her table reading a book. At first, I thought she was just another shy student but I quickly learned there was so much more to the young woman hidden behind those pages. Julia's love for reading comes from her grandmother as told in her essay, "My Love of Reading," where she warmly recalls her grandmother's dusty bookshelves and the memory of "I'd follow her room to room holding the Dr. Seuss book while she sang the words." However, one of the most powerful statements Julia makes is, "I grew up with my grandparents instead of my mother who practically abandoned me and I bared no ill will towards her for this because stories had replaced the resentment." For Julia, her successes and education were fought for and deserved. Her skillful, award winning first paper, "Gilmer," shows the reader the power of place and how her mother has become a more responsible parent by taking us on a tour of her new hometown of Gilmer. Although her mother has changed, their fraught relationship will always be a part of Julia. Once again, in "The Power of Decisions," an essay in response to *The Other Wes Moore*, we see Julia overcome poor decisions and bad environments as she writes, "It would just be easier to go back but I knew that is exactly what it was, easy. I didn't screw up my life in a day it would take time and lots of effort . . . ." All readers can learn the importance of resolve and determination from the powerful voice of the young woman behind the books. -Dawn Terrick

## *Cultivating Conversation*



## **Enough**

### **Reed Bolonyi**

Many women believe the perfect marriage includes a knight in shining armor, a strong protector providing for them until death do them part. While some seem to find this unconditional love, some aren't so lucky and actually even find the opposite. One in every six married women are victims of spousal abuse and actually report it to the authorities. Unfortunately, my own mother was a part of this astonishing statistic. Eager to learn more about the sacrifices she made and to learn about the experience from her point of view, I interviewed my mother, Magali. Who spent eighteen years married to my father. A man she believed was her knight in shining armor, until a drastic life change turned her dream into a nightmare and forced her hand to not only protect her own life, but the life of her children.

My mother and father met at a church function in San Diego, California in the year 1985. My mother explained with a bubbly emotion, "I liked him a lot! He was very handsome and it's funny I liked him because he ignored me most of the time! He talked to your grandma more than he did me!" my mother continued to explain to me giggling. But eventually the butterflies would subside between the two and they would eventually hit it off. A year after meeting they married on November 23rd, 1986.

People typically say the first few years of marriage is very tough for newlyweds, so I asked my mother how exactly she would classify the first few years of her marriage to my father. With her emotion starting to fade and her breathing starting to slow, she replied. "The first 10 years of marriage was perfect. We were head over heels in love. We were the epitome of the couple that everyone wanted to be." I could tell we were headed into a subject that she hadn't spoken of in quite some time. Before I could ask her what she thought the tipping point that ran the marriage astray was. She sorrowfully answered as if I had already asked, "The day your dad's father died was the day he lost a lot of himself. He fell into a deep state of depression which I don't think to this day he's ever been able to recover from." She continued to explain the close relationship my father had with his father and how my grandfather's passing took a large emotional toll on my father, thus causing his downward spiral.

I was curious to know what kinds of side effects the rough depression had on my father and family, my mother grievously explained. "Your father became very isolated from the family. The man I knew for being passive and laid back began to nit-pick every little thing and wouldn't eat at the dinner table anymore. He started to abuse substances and alcohol and it took some time for me to catch on." It was at this time in my Mother's marriage that my father began to heavily abuse drugs and alcohol. His addiction to drugs and alcohol would be a key tipping point effecting every aspect of my mother's life, both emotionally and physically.

After a few years of the marriage seemingly going nowhere but downhill, in an instant it all just seemed to get worse. What went from a personal battle of depression turned into a physical battle between two separate parties. My mother at this point had tears rolling down her face as she spoke, "I remember the first time he physically abused me. I walked in and I could tell he was drunk. I began to question him about it and he snapped and started hitting me. After dragging me across the floor causing me to scrape my hands and knees, he began to punch me so hard I could feel my jaw and ribs crack with every blow. I was so scared that all I thought in my

head was ‘this is how I am going to die.’” My mother managed to get away long enough to get the police on the phone so they could trace the call. Luckily, an officer in her area had a fast response time and the ability to put a stop to the fight before any more damage was done. I could tell as she tearfully retold this story it was replaying in her head as if it had just happened for a second time.

The psychotic actions and tendencies my father had adapted to would go on for a few more years. Nights with my mother in the hospital and my father in jail became quite the normal occurrence for my family. The picturesque marriage that once was there no longer existed and my mother knew if the cycle were to continue, she might not continue to be so lucky. My mother weepingly explained as she wiped a tear from her cheek “I remember the day I filed for divorce. I was separating myself from the man I loved. But I knew if it were to carry on, he would eventually kill me, kill you, or your sister. I was heartbroken because I gave your father an ultimatum of trying to fix himself. But your father chose drugs and alcohol over the family.” She continued to explain how my father ultimately was too attached to drugs and alcohol than to focus on sobering up and how uninterested he was in becoming his former self. He was beyond the point of no return.

My mother continued to explain with a sorrowed emotion and puffy eyes, “I stuck it out for so long because in our vows we made a promise that no matter what, we would be there for each other. In sickness and in health. I tried my best to stick by his side but he made it impossible. I wasn’t going to let him harm my children.” By the time this interview concluded, me and my mother both had tears rolling down our face as we relived some of the hardest years of our lives together. As I closed my notepad I was taking notes in during the interview, I couldn’t help but think of the other women that have experienced the same thing. If the statistic of one in every six married women report abuse to the authorities is true, think about the women who don’t report it but still have it happen. I also couldn’t help but think of the countless people out there that struggle with addiction and substance abuse every single day. There’s always help out there for people struggling with depression, substance abuse, and domestic abuse, so I would encourage anyone who is going through any of those to contact a professional and get the help they need.

Bolonyi, Magali 11, October, 2017.

Statistical data about domestic abuse: <https://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/2193904> 30, November, 2012

## **No Matter What, You Can Overcome Anything**

### **DeJah Harmon**

People don't have control over when or where they're born. We can't pick our life, it's an impossible assumption. Experiences can take an effect either in a positive or negative way on a person's decisions in life. However, you do have control over how and what to take from the experiences you go through. Erica had told me that "Everything happens for a reason." But you have to let it affect you in a positive way. Erica Baker is the third oldest of seven siblings and a mother of a 3 years old boy. She was the type of girl who has an outgoing, spirited, and determined personality. At the age of 19 around the summer of 2016, Erica witnessed a homicide. She blatantly talked with me about her life or death event and the necessities to prevail over her stress. In order to gain personal and emotional insight of someone who survived and prospered from St. Louis' gun violence, I decided to conduct an interview with my best friend, Erica. I knew Erica Baker could provide me with clarity on St. Louis environment, a devastating description of the shooting that night and her experiences after the shooting. If you learn to accept the past, find a purpose and live for the future, you will achieve.

Erica knew how to get along with all of her siblings and was a great friend for comfort but also the "party-starter" of our pack. She was born and raised mostly in Jennings and on the south side of St. Louis, Missouri. The environment in certain but many areas in St. Louis are scarce and full of unstable people, such as the parts that Erica grew up in. In particular, I asked Erica to explain the environment in St. Louis and express how she viewed her own city; unhesitantly and quick to answer she says, "Well, St. Louis environment is messed up, everybody gotta prove a point, everybody thinks guns prove a point and it's life or death because everybody has them... they wanna live up to that thug image which is guns, drugs, and money". It can become very dangerous if everybody has access to a gun. In reality, I think most teens don't have the mindset to even be responsible to own a gun. She has been living in areas that are scarce all of her life so she knows how hard it can be to live and prosper in certain St. Louis areas due to all the gun violence and drug abuse. As Erica told me how the younger generation acted, I felt a sorrow for the innocent people in that environment because they have no other choice but to deal with it every day. Shaking her head in shame, she tells me a little about the people who created that type of environment, "Loyalty is the problem. For real a lot is a problem with them, some people let situations escalate far from nothing. You know, some people let stuff go too far, and some just take stuff too far in life. You know, petty things they don't let roll off their shoulders... our generation doesn't have that sense, just wanna be so hard and so tough because that's the trending topic "no control and disrespect." Erica noticed her environment and didn't want to get involved. She showed me that your birthplace doesn't always determine your identity. Educate yourself on the environment you live in so you'll more aware of what's going on around you.

In early August, Erica and a couple of friends were just driving around and weren't really aware of how dangerous that night would be. She describes that moment that changed her life, "That moment that changed my life was when I was at the wrong place at the wrong time...when my car got shot up unexpectedly." Just typical teenagers who were foolhardy enough to ride around at midnight throughout St. Louis streets. She looked into the screen yet as if she

was still visualizing that same night, with a bit of a smile on her face: “I was happy being a normal teenager, smoking weed, riding around while it was raining. My tires would slide, on some hot stuff, switching lanes, driving fast, and just enjoying life,” Erica had explained, just memorizing the moments right before...

I went to ask her to describe how everything had unfolded that night. Living in truth, Erica suddenly paused, appeared slightly troubled, as she took a deep breath and sighed, she said, “We stopped at the gas station, to get some rellos.” There were three people in the car including Erica. The other guy ran to the store to get the rellos and wasn’t seen for the rest of the night. Simultaneously, there was a robbery taking place, just a few feet away from the gas pump Erica and her friend were stationed at. The men who were getting robbed were selling guns at the gas station. It seemed like Erica’s face matched the emotion she felt when she heard those first shots, as she states, “When I heard the shots, my heart dropped.” I was so focused and curious on what happened next she paused then began with, “So I moved my car. I reversed my car but was boxed in. But before all of that, I heard him telling me: go, go, go, go, go, go! When I reversed my car; I hit the car behind me. I didn’t know whose car it was. I was just thinking about getting out of that situation.” At this point I’m really engaged, and she continues, “So I tried to drive my car off the lot but my car ended up getting hit-up 16 times because I was driving through the crossfire. I only had one way out... If I would’ve stayed there. I felt like my car would’ve got shot up more then it got shot up. So I hurried and drove my car while bullets come by.” Since it was raining her car wasn’t going anywhere, it was sliding on the pavement but when it finally caught grip it was too late, she describes, “Remember it was raining so my tires is sliding because the ground was still wet, then my car jerked off and next thing you know, bullets went through my radio 3 times: Dooshh, Dooshh, Dooshh ! And umm I ducked my head then other one went in. And that bullet would’ve hit me in the back of my neck...” It became really intense and breathtaking just to hear her say those words. After intensively telling the details, Erica describes her feelings during this deadly moment: “I felt like I was dead. I ain’t even gon lie, I gave up. I was like fuck it, forget it I’m dead.” But she didn’t give up because she drove to safety and for help after fleeing from that altercation.

When Erica fled to safety, she checked to see if her friend was unharmed, too. What she saw, it was nothing that she could imagine. Her eyebrows were raised and eyes gazed past the camera as if she was projecting the moment in her head, she continues, “I looked and seen him but all I heard was, hum, that noise when your ears are ringing. And I’m like you alright, you alright then looked at him. He was shot in the head...” She struggled to get the words out, “Looking at him like that scared me. It was nothing I could do about it. I was trying to save his life but at the same time it was nothing I could do about it so I tried to call the police.” Erica was scared out of her mind but she still felt as if he was still alive so she continued to talk to him, encouraging him to fight, but his body was dying slowly. To feel somebody’s pulse gives you the ultimate hope for a miracle. The police arrived shortly after the call then Fox News came as usual to broadcast and finally the ambulances. At this moment, Erica was in shock and in an illusion, as if she developed extrasensory abilities, observing all the commotion, “I was in shock. I was at the point where I felt like I was the walking dead... like I was walking dead.”

Sadly, the young man died that night and Erica returned home with the blood stains on her clothes. This occurrence for Erica has no comparison to anything that happened in her life ever.

In addition to her shocking story, after the shooting, Erica was no longer herself. She suffered depression and post-trauma stress. She deprived herself of sleep for days, food for weeks and she blamed herself for a long time. She didn't care for sleep because the dreams would consist of the event and repeat frequently as a reminder. She went through therapy to talk with a professorial for help with those problems. Also, she let herself go completely, Erica didn't take any showers or brush her teeth. She began to have doubts about herself, her mind and heart-felt lost, she says, "It's crazy how you can lose somebody that fast and you can't do nothing about it" and "I don't know if it was a punishment for me or him." She tries to make sense of why it wasn't her who died that night. Furthermore, she didn't travel anywhere because of how scared she felt, "I don't go out. I feel like what if the same thing happens again." In a way, Erica let that experience get the best of her at this point.

Erica learned that she had more to live for than herself and had to keep going in life. Her three-year-old son gave her that motivational push she needed to defeat that depression. Erica's family and friends also were around for mental and physical support. Erica realized she had somebody that is dependent upon her, she says, "I changed by getting a job the next month." She was at the point where she wasn't going to let that depression and fear take over her life. She needed money to support her son, "This not finna [going to] keep me from working and money coming in for me and my son. This not finna [going to] keep happening." Instead of dissuasive self-talk, on the contrary, Erica now uses motivational self-talk and only encouraging thoughts. She had to get on the bus to make it work. By challenging her fears, she conquered them. She is no longer afraid because she had a purpose to keep striving.

Erica learned that life is too short to be living in the past and you just have to learn from it. She does regret that night and would change it if she could. But at the same time, she can't change the past only gain knowledge to live from it. Erica finds another way to look at that experience, she said. "God, put you in a different place or situation so you can put yourself in a different angle... he probably didn't want me to go down the path I was going." Instead of questioning the whole situation, she creates that idea that everything happens for a reason so you can have a different point of view towards your life and better yourself. You have to possess strength, open mind, and determination to beat hard times so that you can continue with your future.

I feel like it's your duty to find that reason for significant and essential self-clarity. Unfortunately, a person could be at the wrong place at the wrong time. If you had any idea something so out of the ordinary would happen then you would've probably tried your best to avoid the situation. When it comes down to being prepared to not let the tragedies influence your life miserable, it's tough. You have to find your purpose in life as a motivational support. Thus, time heals all wounds so take as much time you need to recover. At some point, it's an arduous journey to conquer whatever life throws at you but you just need to have a purpose or to be willing to overcome it.



Erica is an inspiration to many who went through similar situations. Erica gradually improved into an efficient and effective person from overcoming a situation she had no control over. Striving to see better days, she fought with hope and faith constantly. Erica self-reflects upon the mistakes she made and that creates a sense of rightness from past experiences. There are many morals you can take from Erica's experience. You shouldn't let tragedies and doubts prevent you from your full potential. Although, you don't have control over your environment, your environment plays a tremendous part impacting you both directly and indirectly as a person. You do have control over the decisions you make and the paths to take. You have the choice to either dread upon the past or use those incidents as an opportunity to gain, learn, and teach others through your life experiences. You have to learn from the past, live in the present and hope for the future.

Baker, Erica. Personal Interview. 7 October 2017.

## **Gayle's Life**

### **Kelsey Helm**

One in three girls in the US is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence (Davis, Antoinette, MPH. 2008. Interpersonal and Physical Dating Violence among Teens.). It saddens me greatly when I see that young men and women are affected by abuse in a relationship because physical abuse is something that should never cross someone's mind. Gayle Marie Paul (My grandma asked me to use her middle and maiden names) fell a victim to physical abuse from her first husband when she was just fifteen years old. About only a third of all teens who are in an abusive relationship ever tell anyone about the abuse. Luckily my grandma didn't keep that secret from me so I knew from a young age that physical abuse is in no way, shape, or form okay under any circumstances. After interviewing my grandma Gayle, I got a lot of knowledge about her past and about how abuse in her first marriage made her feel like she was worthless. In some extreme situations in her relationship she even felt like she wasn't human. Along with that, I learned about how she has overcome being in the relationship and turned her life around by never giving up even when it looks like all the odds are against her.

Gayle was just thirteen years old when she met Steve, an older boy she thought was good who turned out to be her worst nightmare. When she met who would soon be her first husband, Steve, she thought he was nice, "I liked him, we all had fun with our friends", Gayle expressed. He was her friend's big brother's friend, so when she would hang out at her friend's house he would always be there. They would all hang out and like she said, have fun while doing it. When I asked her if she saw anything that should have tipped her off about his true colors, she said that, "In hindsight I realized he had a bad temper, and he was aggressive," but as a young girl she didn't pay much attention to those details. What she didn't know about Steve she would later learn when their friendship formed into a real relationship and then eventually marriage.

Her father encouraged them to get married. She was fifteen years old and had gotten pregnant by Steve. "He didn't make me but he wanted me to because he never knew his father and he believed that you should know your father. So, he wanted my kid to know their father", she explained. "I was fifteen, my mom tried to get me to get an abortion. My dad didn't want me to have one. I never wanted an abortion, it wasn't even a consideration. It was just what she wanted...she didn't say I had to have one of course...", she told me, nodding her head and taking a step back into the past. If you think about today's world, if a fifteen-year-old gets pregnant it isn't common at all for her to marry the boy, it's probably more common for her to go the abortion route. I know that the difference between my grandma Gayle and I is that I would have been so scared to be a mom at that time; I would have had to get an abortion. My grandma is a very caring woman and obviously she matured at a young age and knew that she "made a mistake" as some people would see it. So, she kept the baby and married a man that would turn out to be a controlling and manipulating monster.

Steve did many things to control and manipulate my grandmother's life. He would often regulate what clothes she bought and wore, decide what she cooked for dinner, and where she went if she was allowed to go out. While those are some minor but still disturbing things, he did some very drastic and controlling things as well. For instance, he moved her away from her

hometown. Aside from being pregnant, this was the reason she dropped out of school. “We lived in Kansas and he actually moved me to Missouri to keep my parents from having control. That’s when I started realizing how bad it was with him...very controlling,” my grandma told me. Another big example of how controlling and manipulative he was is when he took my grandma Gayle to his sister’s house and kept her in the basement for three days when she was six months pregnant. “I got to go to the bathroom and I got food fed in the bedroom but I couldn’t leave. He was afraid I was going to make a phone call, he didn’t want me to get to the phone. And I begged his sister daily to please call my mom. She’d just avoid it because she was scared, she stayed away from him and tried to not make contact with me because I would beg her to call my mom.”. She has told me about when this happened once before but never in this detail. I did a follow up interview with my grandma and she informed me that Steve actually had hit his sister and also his mother. She said that was the reason his sister tried so hard to avoid my grandma; she didn’t want to get hit again. With hesitation, I asked her how this experience of being held captive made her feel. “Besides helpless it just makes you feel like you’re not a person, like you don’t matter. And you don’t understand how someone can treat you like that, because I was never treated like that as a kid”. I opened up old wounds and my grandma Gayle and I both got a little teary eyed when she gave me her answer and even as I’m typing this paper, emotions come over me at the thought of my grandma feeling this way and being treated this way.

After about two and a half or three years of continuous abuse to the point where her eyes were so black and lips bloody and busted even after she had the baby, she was finally fed up with the abusing, controlling, and manipulative relationship. “We would break up for months at a time, we’d still be married, one time we were broken up for a whole year and we got back together for maybe six weeks and I filed for a divorce...”, she explained. She says that when you love someone you always will love them, but it wasn’t the case with Steve because he would always start it up as soon as she tried to give him another chance. “Sometimes we’d see each other but it was always the abuse would start or the controlling instantly, even one day I spent with him. You know, it was if I saw him for one day ‘oh I want you to come back and get away from your parents,’” she explained. After she finally left for a year and saw how much she was worth, she knew she could never go back to that environment. “At that point, I’d realized it and after that long of being around other people, my other family and friends, you feel like ‘I do matter’. You didn’t want to go back to that and I knew it would never change at that point.”, she said with a small smile. I could physically see even after forty years how she felt when she left him and stopped all the domestic violence, how talking about leaving gave her the same satisfaction at sixty as it did when she was eighteen and had just divorced him. Steve was never involved with my aunt Amanda, my grandma said that he didn’t ask to see her regularly, but always asked for her on Christmas.

After my grandma left Steve and finalized the divorce, she met my grandpa Tom. There was about an eight-month time frame between the two events. After a while, they got married and had my mom, Lynne, and my uncle, T.J. My grandma’s life with my grandpa Tom was not the best. Unfortunately, there were times when my grandpa Tom would abuse my grandma, but unlike Steve, it would happen more when he was drunk. “The first time he did it he wasn’t drunk; he pushed me in to the wall. The difference between he and Steve was that Grandpa Tom

never hit me in the face. He would twist my arm and stuff like that,” she explained. She told me in the follow up interview that my grandpa Tom would be gone for three or four days and come home drunk. He would then do the petty things like shove her and twist her arm and things like that solely because she was upset that he was gone for multiple days without notice or excuse. He was not as extreme as Steve; however, it still was not okay. It was almost as if this was her fate and she couldn’t escape the abuse. She overcame her first marriage just to get into another relationship and get abused again. Sometimes when I think about this I get really angry at my Grandpa Tom. I think, “How could he treat that poor girl who just escaped this kind of situation the same way?”. I was actually present for the last time my grandma ever got abused. My two cousins and I were staying the night with our grandparents. I don’t know what happened to start up the argument but it ended with my grandpa shoving her. When he did this, the three of us kids were behind her and we all fell down as well as her on top of us. After that day, despite not knowing that this was a reoccurring event, we never let him forget that he pushed our grandma and she fell into us and knocked us all down. That was the day that the abuse had finally come to an end.

After leaving Steve and turning her life around, she has since opened and closed an antique furniture store. It had great potential but was not in the right area for the type of store it was. As for her spirits, even after all the heartbreak and pain, she loves herself and everyone around her. She no longer cares about what happened to her, however she doesn’t forget about it. She knows that she can’t change anything so she tries not to get caught up on it. I think my grandma Gayle did a great job of making something out of herself regardless of the hardships she went through. The only thing that makes this hard for her is that she had to live through it again when her daughter started dating her now husband around the same age she was when she married Steve.

Despite how open my grandma Gayle is with our family about this situation, her daughter still ignored signs and followed the same path. While my grandma Gayle herself isn’t directly abused anymore, she feels it through her daughter, who is currently in a used-to-be abusive marriage. My aunt Amanda’s husband used to abuse her and gave off some of the same signals as her father, Steve, did when he started being abusive to her mother, Gayle when she was a baby. I asked my grandma Gayle how she felt when she first found out about the abuse her daughter endures, “It was horrible, it was horrible. And it brought back all those memories and I know how she felt but I also know that sometimes, I think, a parent being so involved and controlling as well makes you stay with the person that’s abusive and I didn’t want to do that to her. I tried to stay out of it but be there and I don’t think it helped either way. I don’t think it matters with that abusive person.”. My uncle doesn’t hit my aunt Amanda anymore, that’s something that has relieved my whole family. It hurts me to know about the abuse that goes on in this world and to think, sometimes, I was even there to see it happen to my aunt, it was heartbreaking and infuriating; I can’t imagine how my grandma Gayle feels on the inside.

My grandma Gayle told me about the struggles and hardships of being with someone who completely changes who they are over a short period of time and proves every thought you have of them to be wrong. She shared emotions and stories with me that made me want to cry, scream, and fight because of frustration. In the end, I learned about how strong she is and how she

overcame the abusive relationship and had a very successful life. She explained the abuse she went through and the emotions that ran through her as it happened, as hard as that was. All in all, she taught me that no matter what, you should not give up. If you keep trying you will turn out like my grandma and see that life gets easier. You might have to work harder than you usually would and you might run into the same problems as you did before; but that does not mean you should stop trying. She also taught me that you should always be more aware of other's actions and mannerisms; it just might keep you out of a bad situation. You shouldn't live your life in fear but also you should be aware about the people you date and even marry because there are cruel people in the world. Just remember, if my grandma had given up and stopped fighting she may have ended up dead; that is not an exaggeration.

Wooton, Gayle. Personal Interview. 8 October 2017

Davis, Antoinette, MPH. 2008. Interpersonal and Physical Dating Violence among Teens. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency Focus. Available at [http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2008\\_focus\\_teen\\_dating\\_violence.pdf](http://www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2008_focus_teen_dating_violence.pdf).

## **The Starting Point**

### **Kayla Johnson**

The civil rights movement was a very popular movement to secure for African Americans equal access to and opportunities for the basic privileges and rights of U.S. citizenship. Many leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., influenced people of all races to unite and protest with the method to help push this bill and in 1964 The Civil Rights Bill was signed. During the movement people including my grandma Sallye Johnson participated to help make a difference and many movements took place by using non violence. Through her experiences my grandma learned her place as black woman in America and she overcame that obstacle by standing up to what she believed in with love and awareness. Not only for her, but for future generations to come.

My grandma Sallye Johnson grew up in a small town of Parkin, Arkansas. Her mother and father had a total of nine children. With a population of a thousand it was easy to get to know people. As my grandma said with a smile on her face, “Everybody knew everybody and everybody was friendly. It didn’t matter what race you were” (2:10). Since her father was a sharecropper, she and her siblings would play at ease with all of their different colored friends. She explained to me that segregation was a terrible thing, but it wasn’t necessarily a bad thing when it came to the people you surround yourself with. “It was great! That’s all we knew. We went to an all black church and went to an all black school and most of the black people lived in the same community” (4:11). That’s what she was used to. Although she and her family had many restrictions, segregation didn’t matter to them because they always knew how to make it work. She continued to live her young life not having to go through some of the struggles most African Americans did at the time. Later she learned that the views she had as a child would change because not everyone was open to a world without segregation.

As time went on my grandma understood her place as a black woman during the 1960’s. During her last few years in high school in 1964 the Civil Rights Movement Bill was passed. My grandma felt that since the bill was signed that she would “take her rights” (6:06). That day my grandma and her friends Joanne and Maxine were so excited they decided to celebrate. In Parkin, the drug store had a soda and ice cream fountain connected to it. The whites were served in the front and the blacks were to sit in the back of the shop. Granted their rights, my grandma and her friends happily plopped down in the front of the shop where they were waiting to be served. She said with excitement, “Oh great we can sit on the stools!” (6:58). When they were seated the waiters finally came up to them. The three girls asked for a soda but the waiter wouldn’t serve them. With a defeated look she said, “The Civil Rights Bill has been passed so we feel like that we have equal rights to sit here”(7:19). Still not budging, the owner came to the pharmacy and told my grandma and her friends that he refused to serve them. With anger and confusion running through their heads my grandma and her friends stayed in the stools labeled “Whites Only” and decided that they were going to do a sit-in at the shop.

Hours go by still standing their ground and, many people outside of the pharmacy were calling them bitches and negroes. While screaming at them, they continued to throw sticky napkins and leftover waffle cones at their feet. The crowd didn’t phase them and they didn’t get

hurt, but the owner of the shop called the sheriff of the town and he quickly closed down the pharmacy. While my grandma and her friends sat there they whispered nervously not knowing what would happen once the sheriff came. Doubt was running strong between all of them but they knew it was too late to back out. As the sheriff pulled up to the scene he sat down next to them and explained that it would take up to a month for blacks to be able to go anywhere whites could. After the sit in my grandma told me, “I felt great! But, after I felt afraid because I knew my daddy was goin’ get me. I felt that I was a part of a movement for the future and also for that time” (9:28). My grandma did not do anymore sit ins because her father didn’t approve. Both of her parents were scared for her life and demanded her to not step foot on any white man’s property until they knew for sure. Although my grandma and her friends were scared they had no regrets because they knew that it was the right thing to do. This shows that my grandma is fearless and because of this experience she has grown wiser. She has passed her lessons on to the rest of the family to show how strong of a woman she is.

The struggles she had to go through like segregation, sit-ins and growing up in a low income family helped her become the strong woman she is today. She always found the good side of a bad situation. Her positivity along with other people who was apart of a movement is what helped many people be open to accepting black people being equal in America. This experience was eye-opening to my grandma alternatively, she told me the most important lesson she learned was, “If you believe in something you should take part of it whether you are going to get in trouble with your parents or anyone in authority. Also when you do something I learned that you should always think what the end result is going to be”(25:38). Looking back on the sit-in she told me that she didn’t think about what the outcome would be before going into the pharmacy. From then on whenever my grandma does something she does it out of love, peace and, wisdom. For she knew that was the key to determining any result and ensuring that all movements had an affecting starting point. Although we still have problems today, movements like this was the first step for a better world.

Johnson, Sallye B. “The Starting Point.” Personal Interview. 5, October, 2017.

## **Civil Rights Movement**

### **Jerra Merrifield**

Throughout history, African Americans have been the victims of bigotry. In 1619, African slaves were first brought to America in order to produce high demand crops such as tobacco. Even when slavery was abolished in 1865, African Americans remained the victims of bigotry. In 1896 Jim Crow laws were passed which prevented African Americans to have the same rights as everyone else. These laws prohibited people of color from associating with the same schools, restaurants, stores, and even from using the same bathrooms and water fountains as whites. I have always had an interest in learning more about the Civil Rights Movement and wanted to know more about what happened outside of the textbook. I had a long discussion with my grandmother, Dee Merrifield who was born in 1934. During the interview, she discussed the non-violent protests she witnessed, thus fostering her desire to participate and impact the movement and the people thought so questionably about.

While growing up my grandma lived in a very small town in Missouri. She tells me that there were not many black people in her neighborhood, but she never felt frightened or in danger when around them. My grandma was young when the movement began. She said she didn't witness many of the protests, but when she was younger she said, "I witnessed something in downtown Saint Louis, at that time it was a lunch counter. They did not used to serve blacks." My grandma tells me how she saw black people sitting at the lunch bar and the server refused to serve them. Some of the white people in the diner refused to sit down. "Well, my mom said, 'well we're sitting down there'." They sat and ate their food while people gave them looks. Another event she saw was a pool that for a long time had been segregated and was becoming integrated. She told me, "There was a lot of discussion and protesting, but it never got violent," she said. As integration was becoming more common, others who were against it showed their anger by protesting.

When my grandma watched Martin Luther King strive for non-violent protests, she felt the urge to get involved. As my grandmother became older, she decided she wanted to make a difference. I asked her what made her want to get involved. She told me it was what she saw happen in Selma, Alabama. My grandma became a part of a civil rights group at her church. This group had men and women, both white and black, who came together to discuss the current issues and decide what needed to be done to improve them. They had a priest that would be the advisor for the group and start discussions when necessary, but later she said there was never a time when people kept silent. My grandma told me outside of the interview that she wishes she would have done more and it made her sick to see how people were treated just based on their skin tone.

When my grandpa became a part of the Air Force, they were stationed in Florida. My grandma started working in the military base with my grandpa. She says, "there were some very prejudiced people working there." She vaguely says that they would get into "discussions" with them while she worked there. "This one man told me," she states, "'You should just go home you're a Yankee n\*\*\*\*\* lover'". My eyes went wide. Anyone who knows my grandmother knows she is the sweetest thing, she never insults people and avoids confrontation as much as



possible. I could not wrap my head around someone calling her that. She expresses her discomfort by hesitating and stumbling over her words.

While they were in Florida she noticed how terrible people were to African Americans. She says in that town “they had black drinking fountains, black bathrooms. Oh, I have never heard of such a thing.” We go on to discuss that those rules were the Jim Crow laws of 1896. My grandma continues to say how she would drink at whatever water fountain she wanted and was once confronted by a white man. The man pointed to the sign above the fountain that said “coloreds”. She just continued to drink at whatever fountain or use whatever bathroom was convenient. My grandma also described that if a white person would be walking on an average sidewalk, the black person also walking was supposed to step off the sidewalk to let the other person by. My grandma told me this was not a rule, but a social norm, which was something that I had never heard before. She continued to emphasize that at no time was there violent protest from this bigotry.

When my grandmother started talking about Martin Luther King Jr, she talked about how great a leader he was. She really admired his theory on how nonviolent protest made bigger statements. When I asked my grandma why she first wanted to get involved, she said, “because I saw the terrible things that happened in Selma, Alabama. How the governor George Wallace didn’t want to let black kids into the colleges.” She describes how people in busses went down to peacefully protest, “and they hit them with hoses and they turned hoses on them and they set a bus on fire.” While talking about this my grandma really emphasized her story with the movement of her hands, she talked with her hands more than the average person would. While talking about the bus on fire she flailed her hands in the air, almost trying to reenact the flames. Her eyes would open wide every time she would remember a new memory. We later talked about the similarities and differences of racism now and racism then. She says that there are not many similarities because we have come such a long way. However, she does believe that black people are sometimes targeted by the police. She does not like how some of their protests do become extremely violent. She gives her idea of a solution by saying, “something drastic has to be done in the cities, in the black areas, where there is so much violence because that just spills over. It spills over into how people think about colored people-and we should start with the really young children.” She believes that there are areas that need to be fixed. In order to do that, we would have to start with the younger children and teach them new ways of acceptance.

While listening to my grandma talk, I learned new things I didn’t know about the Civil Rights movement. I gained more knowledge about my grandma and what she had seen and the time she lived through. In school, textbooks do not have the descriptive powers that an eyewitness gives you while talking to them. Textbooks tend to leave out small details about forms of hostility towards the movement's supporters. To illustrate this, my grandma was pointed to the “correct color” water fountain and even called names for supporting this movement. With that in mind, I could only imagine what it was like to live in such harsh, uncomfortable times. Hearing my grandma speak about this topic only makes me want to learn more. I feel that what should be done in the future is educate people who don't understand to prevent history repeating itself.

## **A Different Path**

### **Miranda Merritt**

Many children grow up without a father figure or a mother figure. Some choose to live by the statistics, others choose to rise above. My father Marvin Vincent Merritt was one of the others that chose a different path. Instead of learning to be a man from his father, the U.S Navy taught him. The Navy taught him how to think independently, how to take care of himself, and how to react in dire situations. He didn't allow himself to be labeled instead he chose his own path.

Despite the fact that, my dad grew up without his father in his life, he didn't allow his misfortunes to define the man he is today. He never spoke to me about his father being absent in his life, because it's a topic he shunned to recall. When my dad was three years old his father walked out of his life. He grew up watching his mother work late hours and raising six children on her own. He said, "I remember my mom always at work, so my sister Paula would make sure that we all had dinner on the table." Growing up he didn't comprehend why his father abandoned him, but he realized what kind of man he didn't want to become.

Although, he distinguished that he wouldn't be like his father, he searched for guidance to become a man. When his mother re-married he told me about how he overheard his step-brothers talk about their adventures in the Navy. He was intrigued by their stories of traveling to different countries, and how they enjoyed serving their country. Hearing about his step-brother's adventures inspired him to want more in life and have an adventure of his own. Not wasting any time, he went and spoke to the recruiter for the Army and the Marines, but he didn't connect with either one. When he spoke to the recruiter for the Navy, he found what he was searching for. When he signed a four-year term with the Navy he decided that he wouldn't tell anyone until he was ready. He clarified, "I kept it a secret because I didn't want anyone to talk me out of doing it" (5:10). He kept his secret until a week before he was to deploy. "When I finally told my mother and step-father that I joined the Navy and I was to deploy in a week, they still didn't believe me!" They didn't believe my dad until the day they drove him to the Kansas City Airport. On December 26th, 1987, my dad was on his way to a life changing adventure.

Even though there were some disbelievers, he didn't allow the lack of confidence to hold him back from his adventure. When he arrived in Great Lakes, Illinois the weather was the coldest it had ever been. He said, "They had a record winter, the coldest it got was negative 80 below with the wind chill factor. Our glasses were freezing then cracking when we came indoors" (9:15). He bundled up with every layer he had to stay warm. At that moment, he wasn't certain what he had gotten himself into. He knew what he was searching for, but basic training wasn't something he prepared for. He told me, "In basic training they planned to tear us down, and get rid of bad habits to rebuild us into good sailors" (9:45). He tackled the brutal threats, and didn't allow himself to break down. He wanted to prove that he could do it, not only to himself, but to the others who doubted him. He recanted on how he became part of a brotherhood, "They taught us how to get along with people of different color, and background. In the Navy we were taught that the color of skin doesn't matter, Navy Blue was the only color of importance" (10:10). The Navy taught him that they were all equal, that each one of them had the same opportunities regardless of someone's color of skin. He learned how to think independently by

recognizing one color of importance. He was taught that they were all brothers of the Navy, they had to trust each other and get along with one another because it may be a black or white man that saves their life. Going into the Navy not only taught him how to be a good sailor, but it also taught him how to be a good man. When he mentioned how the Navy taught him not to judge on the color of someone's skin, or where they came from I thought about how he raised me not to be judgmental. I understood more how the Navy molded him into the man he is today. Since he grew up without his father he wasn't taught not to judge until later in his life. I thought about how thankful I am that he taught me these traits early. He stayed motivated to be better and didn't let others discourage him.

While the Navy taught him to think of each other as brothers, he also learned how to take care of himself in a different perspective. Once he completed basic training he was sent to the USS Independence which is an air craft carrier. When he was placed on the ship he was taught what was expected of him. He said, "There was a lot of cleaning, and inspections to do for the planes on the ship. They had to be cleaned once a week, and deep cleaned once a month" (14:55). He had to clean the planes to the Navy's standards to pass inspections. He also had to keep his uniforms clean every minute of the day. "I had to keep my set dress of blues, and set of dress whites clean and ready for inspections at any time" (16:00). It was a requirement for him to maintain his shape to be able to fit into his uniforms. The Navy taught him to be independent and accountable for himself. He talked about how there wasn't much to do while the ship was moving, so he had to learn patience as well. He stated "I was either working, sleeping, or eating. There was a line for everything. I stood in line to use the bathroom, to go to the store, to eat, or to use the gym. No matter where I would go I would wait and stand in line" (16:05). He talked about how they wanted to keep the men on the ship busy, so no one would get stir crazy being out at sea. When my dad explained to me how life was on the ship, I laughed at the thought of a ship full of men walking around, or standing in a line. He thought he already knew how to take care of himself until his knowledge was put to the test. The Navy taught him new traits, he learned how to be patient, and he learned the importance of staying in shape.

Whereas my dad gained self-confidence, he also experienced terror while on the ship. He explained during "Flight Operations" he had the biggest scare of his life. "Flight Operations" was a big operation where there were planes coming on, and planes leaving all within a minute in a half of each other. When one of our planes came back it had a broken navigation system one of the fixes for that it needed an INU which stands for Internal Navigation Unit, (an INU is a bunch of driver scopes that are packed into a box that weighs about 80lbs.) so I grabbed an INU threw it over my shoulder, and ran to the nose of the plane. While I was running to the nose of the plane, the pilot didn't raise one of the jet blast deflectors. I had a face full of jet blast that knocked me end over end. I still had the INU on my shoulder and it beat me to death almost" (1:45). He continued explaining how the jet blast was strong enough to send thirty to forty guys lurching on the deck. He made a quick decision to hold onto the INU. He furtherly explains why, "I figured it was just a little bit more weight I was afraid I was going to get blown overboard" (3:30). He explained how someone tackled him right before he headed for the propeller of the plane. Even though my dad didn't see combat, or serve during a war he still faced danger on the ship. Holding onto the INU caused more damage than the jet blast in his face. When he was taken to

the hospital he was relieved his arm wasn't broken, but it was bruised from his shoulder to his wrist and his shoulder swelled the size of his leg. "I was lucky that I wasn't thrown overboard" (4:24). Since the ships are constantly moving if someone were to be thrown overboard the ship wouldn't stop. He said, "They send a rescue helicopter to rescue the man overboard, but it's an 80 foot drop from the ship to sea. By the time you were to hit the water you would be knocked unconscious" (17:30). He recovered from his injuries and was placed back to work. Hearing about my dad's near-death experience I admired his bravery. When I asked him if he was scared to join the Navy he responded, "You don't think about being scared. You just do it" (18:04) It made me appreciate the men and women who are serving now, and our veterans for placing their lives on the line for our country.

After eight years of serving in the Navy my dad finally decided that it was time to come home. "They were giving out the option to retire early if you met all the requirements and I happened to meet them all." He was finally heading home to his new home he bought in Oak Harbor, WA where his wife and two daughters were waiting for him. He tells me with pride in his eyes, "It felt good to be home with my wife and two daughters. I was ready to start a new adventure with my family" (20:55) After the service he sold his house in Oak Harbor, WA and was ready to return to Saint Joseph. He missed his family and wanted his daughters to grow up around his loved ones. He found a house and moved back as soon as he could. When he was settled in his new home he went out looking for work in the electrical field. Now that he had experience on planes and houses, he began looking for a job he knew he was trained for. He wanted to make more money so he went to Hillyard Technical School to receive a license as an electrician so he could join a union. After long hours, and determination his hard work paid off.

Joining the Navy was the adventure he was searching for. Not only did he enjoy being a part of a brotherhood, but joining the Navy also taught him the essentials of manhood. He wouldn't be the man he is today if he didn't take the leap of faith to join the Navy. "I believe that it taught me to be a better person in general. It helped my family to be more patriotic, and proactive people" (22:08). Joining the Navy changed his views about military. In general, being a part of a brotherhood is something that you don't get to experience at an everyday job. It's not just about serving for your country. It's about working together, and being a brother to the man on your left, and the man on your right. Everyone was treated as the same in the Navy it didn't matter where they came from, or what the color of their skin was. They were all there to fight together, and be a brother to one another. My dad explains to me with inspiration on his face about how he doesn't regret joining the Navy he tells me about how it was a calling that he had been searching for all along, and how he is honored to be a veteran.

Although, my dad grew up not knowing who his father was, he didn't allow statistics to label him. He chose to rise above what everyone else knew he would be, and chose his own path. I honor my dad for his accomplishments, and I am inspired from his story. Hearing his story motivated me to want to extend my abilities to become something greater with determination, and dedication. I can see how the Navy has molded him into the man he is today. Not only did the Navy teach him what it takes to be a man, it also taught him how to be a great father figure for his children, and I am grateful to have him as my father.

Merritt, Marvin. "A Different Path." Personal Interview. 1 Oct. 2017

## **Moving to the US**

### **Mijoe Mundungu**

Every year, thousands of African people cross the Atlantic Ocean to immigrate to the USA. Jean Paul Mundungu, forty years old, is an immigrant originally from the Congo. He was a self-employed person back in his country. After being selected by the US State Department through the Diversity Visa Program, he and his family moved from the Congo to the United States in 2012. He arrived in St. Joseph, Missouri to stay with his sister, who has been living in the city for a few years. Currently he works as a Systems Engineer at News - Press Gazette. I have always been inspired by people who work hard to improve their lives. In this city, most African immigrants work in factories or stores. A few have been able to upgrade their lives after attending school. By overcoming challenges Mundungu has improved his family's stability, which is inspiring.

During the early years in the United States, immigrants in general face many challenges due to several changes. They find themselves in a new environment where they don't necessarily have the resources to compete and thrive. The culture, language, and lifestyle changes are the other challenges that create a lot of frustration and stress. Jean Paul Mundungu admitted "My early days in America were very depressing and confusing." It was depressing because he suddenly found himself in an environment that was out of his comfort zone. He had to rely on people of good faith. Due to a lack of communication skills, he could not find a job consistent with his academic background. To provide for his family, he decided to work in a factory but he did not like the experience and gave up. He was confused and struggling with the idea to go back to his country. Despite this hard time, Mundungu reported, "I wanted to stay in America because I realized that there is a lot of available opportunities here." He was able to overcome these difficulties because he believed in his strength and made the decision to move forward.

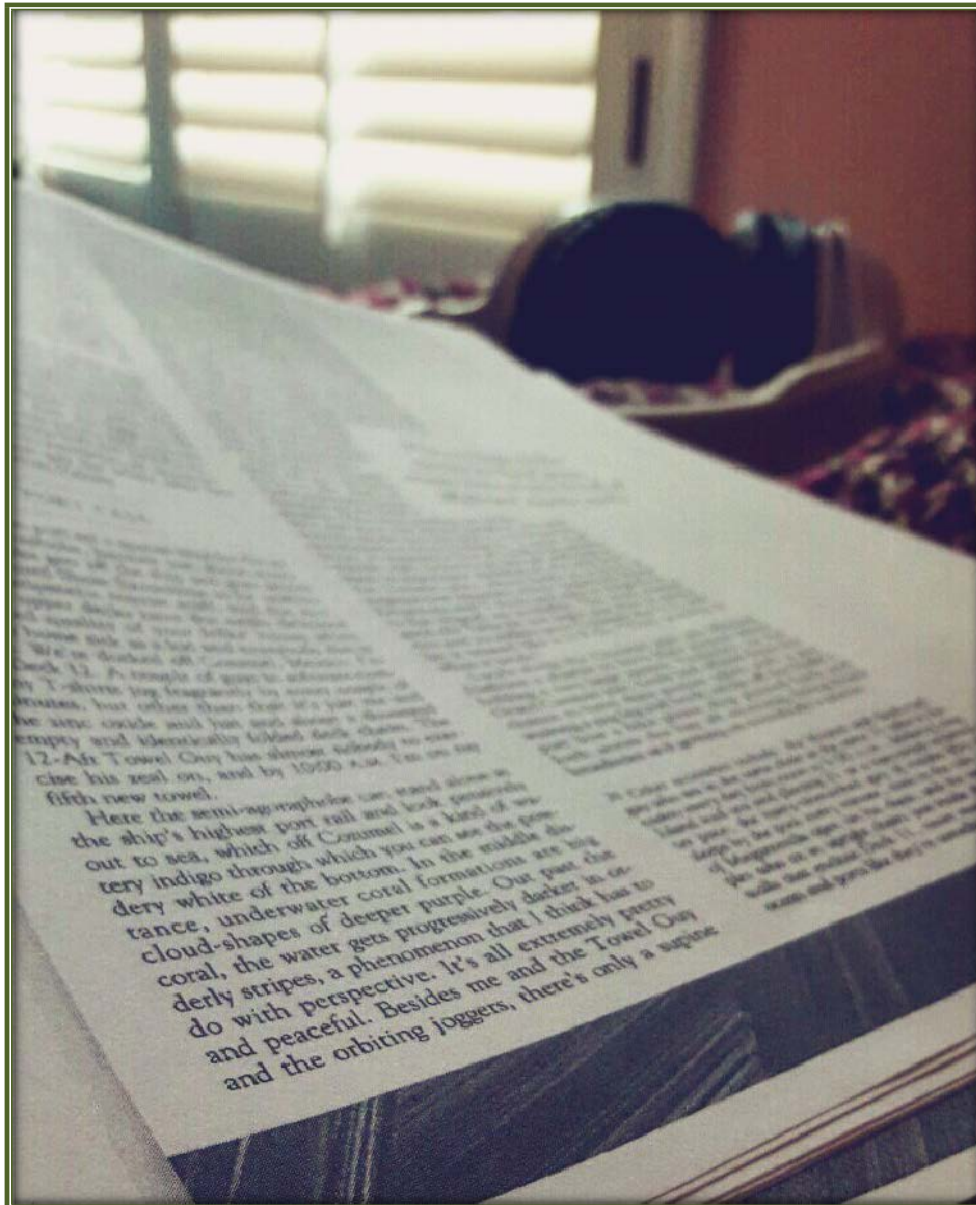
Without developing the necessary skills required to succeed in American society, immigrants can spend years without being able to make a decent living. The skills necessary are usually related to the ability to communicate, learn a profession, and build a network. Mundungu confirmed, "After working very hard on my communication skills and take multiple advanced classes, I began to see many changes in academic opportunities and social networking." Two years later, he found a decent job and helped his family to become relatively financially stable. He also realized that he needed someone to guide and help him set up strategies for success. He found a mentor and began learning about the basics of the American lifestyle. He still meet with his mentor once a month to evaluate his progress. By becoming a soccer coach assistant and joining a social groups at his church, he saw his social network grow very fast. Mundungu feels that despite overcoming most challenges, he still has a long way to go to find real stability. His determination and ambition made his successes possible.

The idea of immigrating to another country, especially to the United States, is a good thing, but every newcomer should be prepared since there are challenges associated with moving to a country with a different socio-economic structure. Mundungu said "The lack of social life, communications skills, some types of food and entertainment can make life difficult especially for big families." When people, like Mundungu who came through the Diversity Visa Program,

first arrive in the United States, there is not a structure designed to welcome and provide them with any kind of guidance. It requires personal effort to improve their living conditions. He explained that since most Africans are raised in an environment where the community plays an important role, it can be a little bit difficult at the beginning to live in a society that emphasizes individuality. As general advice, Mundungu recommends African immigrants, “ have a definite plan and take action everyday if they want to succeed. Otherwise, they should prepare to live permanently frustrated in this country, since success in America is a permanent and individual struggle.” It comes through education and a lot of discipline.

Success in life is a choice that each individual make according to his purpose. Mundungu’s determination to improve his living conditions has inspired me to focus on my education. He has motivated me to work hard on my communication skills, expand my social network, and never give up in my academic journey despite all the challenges. He even influenced me to get a mentor with whom I can work on a success plan. Like Jean Paul Mundungu, I have many challenges to face before reaching my goal. However, I feel determined to get my degree, not only because I want to improve my life but also I want to be a model for my daughters and others. By interviewing Mundungu, I also discovered that reaching goals in life is not only about working hard but also being persistent and having a clear vision.

## *A Researched Response*



## **My Literary Saga Continues**

### **Jessica Bright**

My determination to keep going and drive to always be a better person have never reigned truer than today, because I'm middle aged and enrolled in college. My literacy past may have been riddled with negative experiences, but each good grade I'm earning in college is contradicting those experiences. After recently reading an essay by Russell Baker and another by Frederick Douglass, I felt comforted being able to relate my experiences similarly with theirs. Racing thoughts, a negative school environment, and self-doubt are three hurdles I had to overcome in my ongoing pursuit of better literacy. Learning how to organize my everlasting thinking was the first hurdle in my formal education. My brain is wired to compulsively ask questions, and is never satisfied with simple answers. The solution I found to combat this curse would help greatly advanced my literacy skills. The second major literary obstacle I would have to overcome was later during my high school years. The school environment was terrifying and not conducive of learning. Many of my fellow students were gang bangers, drug dealers, pimps, and killers. Every day I attended school, I was vulnerable to violence, drugs, and sex. Amidst the chaos, I learned how to be invisible, focused on my work, and earned many great academic achievements. The problem was I believed my achievements were just a fluke because no other students even tried to learn. I participated in class, therefore I got an A. My teachers allowing illiterate twelfth graders to graduate and skeptical words others spoke about the education I was receiving compiled into self-doubt and led me to believe I would never be able to compete at a college level. My 10th grade year, I scratched college off my agenda. Self-doubt became the third hurdle I'm still overcoming today. I was misguided into believing I was just another statistic and failed to utilize my full capabilities until now. The rewarding experiences college is providing me with proves to me the things about me that I once saw as my weaknesses are really my strengths.

The earliest problem I had to face regarding literacy was learning to organize and control my non-stop thinking. My brain was always searching, wanting to know why things are the way they are. This perpetual thinking was clouding my brain with questions, and inhibiting me from focusing on one topic at a time. In the essay, "How I Learned to Read and Write," by Frederick Douglass, he sums up the frustration I felt by stating, "It was this everlasting thinking of my condition that tormented me. There was no getting rid of it" (274). I began to ask myself, "Is my brain damaged or can I teach myself how to control my thoughts?" I knew I had to dissect every avenue of each question that popped up, but I didn't know how to organize in my brain all the new information. In the sixth grade, I became determined to find a technique that allowed me the ability to both satisfy my thirst for knowledge and organize my thinking. I began to compile numbered lists of random topics I had questions about. At my public library I would use the card cabinets to search for books on those topics. I greatly strengthened my literacy skills using this technique. Researching one topic would lead to another related topic and I would eventually have scanned through several books gaining new insight from several perspectives. This technique of quickly researching multiple books, gave me the understanding that people will interpret one situation in many ways. The library was a quiet, well-lit place filled with books which I used as a tool to answer pressing questions. The library also provided me the opportunity



to interact with others who enjoyed seeking answers. In my adult years, I am still a chronic list maker, nor do I like to procrastinate. Real life issues and responsibilities don't allow me time to adequately research topics like before, but the internet provides me with quick answers. Google has replaced my library and effortlessly supplies me with the most up to date answers. I may have changed the resource's I use to research, but my drive to keep moving forward is still strong. College has proven to me that my researching skills, and my ability to always look for more than one answer is a strength and necessity in the degree I'm pursuing.

The second hurdle I had to jump was overcoming a high school environment that was full of temptation and violence but not much learning. I learned to succeed, I had to remain invisible. If I raised my hand to ask a question, other students would get mad at me and make rude comments, because I made the teacher keep talking. My peers just wanted to sit quietly in class then leave when the bell rang. In the essay, "School vs. Education," Russell Baker says, "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" (225). The teachers had no problem passing illiterate students through to the next grade, so there was no incentive to learn. A lot of my peers had kids at home or couldn't read anyway, so they felt like school was a waste of time. The school day would start with each student walking through a long row of metal detectors, a uniformed police officer patting you down, and searching your bags. The students just left their guns in their cars. During computer class one day, we heard gunshots fired outside. The class ran to the window and watched a brown car driving around the parking lot actively shooting at a fleeing man. During class hours, most of the period the teacher would spend disciplining students. Gangs were predominant within our community, so some of these kids in my classes were hardened thugs, wearing colors that represent their affiliation, and only attending school because the court ordered them. They would sell drugs out of their lockers, and the police would bring in drug dogs and bust them once a month. Every time I walked by their locker, they would try to push drugs on me. Once, I got scared when a fellow classmate of mine, who was a known pimp stood in front of me and had another man behind me. Using a caring voice, the pimp tried to convince me to try his drugs. I remember his eyes were jet black and his stance was intimidating. He wanted me to get hooked, so I would work for him. This pimp had a stairway he designated for his girls to perform sex acts in. Everyone knew if you see a man standing at the top of the stair well, you do not enter. The day I saw my teacher come through that stairwell door, all sweaty with disheveled hair; was the day I realized my teacher's true priorities. The threat of violence was real, and disrespecting someone meant you would receive physical harm. During Spanish class one day, paramedics and police rushed into the classroom across the hall. We went to the window facing the hallway and witnessed a bloodied student with a metal hair pick sticking out of his eye. Another student had stabbed him so hard, it lodged in his skull. Violence gave quick results and without using it, they wouldn't know how to solve problems. There was a kid who I grew up with named Joseph. In the ninth grade, Joseph was tried as an adult and sent to prison for murder. I found out he was much older than me and had been held back many times. Contending with all these distractions made me realize, if I remained quiet and acted like I didn't care about learning, other students would leave me alone. When the teachers were able to instruct, I would take notes and study homework at night. I had grown up with those kids and become accustomed to that environment, but I still felt a drive to learn and the determination

within me to keep asking questions. I ended up graduating high school with a 3.2 GPA, the Presidential Award for excellence, and a few college courses completed. Even though I doubted the quality of the education I received, those achievements I earned helped me get into college and skip a few courses and earn extra tuition money. Currently, starting my second semester at Missouri Western State University, I am succeeding, and my grades are reflection of that. Only now, looking back do I realize the impact these negative experiences in school had on my future.

I started to doubt my literacy abilities around the tenth grade. I believe it was a combination of the learning environment, discouraging teachers and lack of a school curriculum, all contributed to my doubt. I was discouraged because I knew whether I put my best effort into my work everyone earned a C, and passed. In the essay, "School vs Education," Russell Baker states "The child taught by school that he is dumb observes that neither he, she nor any of the many children who are even dumber, ever fails to be promoted to the next grade" (225). Our curriculum was often watered down and lacking to incorporate everyone's literacy abilities. My teachers couldn't expect much from students who did little to no work at all. I attended an urban predominantly black school, so I was usually the only white person in class. We were seated closely in rows averaging 42 students in a class. If our teacher did have text books to teach from, it was never enough, and we always had to share. The teacher would often pair me with students who couldn't read, because I was a strong reader and patient person. Sometimes, I would see homework or books other schools were assigning, and the content was more advanced than the work we were assigned. I thought about how wonderful it would feel to transfer to a better school. Then I would instantly frown upon the idea, knowing their more advanced curriculum would put me behind. Determined to improve my literacy skills, I often participated in class discussion and enjoyed answering questions. My teachers would get discouraged that I was the only student raising my hand. One day, the teacher told me in front of the whole class, "Do not raise your hand anymore." He later told me I was at the wrong school, and that this school wouldn't get me anywhere. That entire incident made me doubt my literacy skills tremendously. With all my achievements, I knew I was one of the best students in the entire school, and even my teacher was doubting my abilities. After earning my diploma, my brain idly sat for 17 years; mainly only reading magazines and children's books. After all these years, I decided to challenge my self-doubt and enroll in college. I did this for two reasons: to eventually retire and to show my daughter I value education. I'm taking a chance at possibly failing, and with each good grade I'm earning, erasing my self-doubt.

In my journey through literacy, I believe I have proven my true strength is determination and always striving to find answers. I knew my overthinking needed to be controlled, and I successfully came up with a solution. Even though my childhood schools didn't provide adequate educational materials or a stable learning environment, I tried my best every day and stayed focused. I learned how to use my racing thoughts as a strength, made academic achievements in a negative environment, and am now gaining self-confidence. Being a college student, having adequate supplies, and sitting alongside goal driven individuals is encouraging me to continue my education while casting away my doubts. This new college experience is proving to me, no matter where a person comes from, if they have passion in their heart for something, they can overcome anything.

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## **My Evolution of Literacy**

### **DeJah Harmon**

An incredibly small amount of people read and write for the enjoyment. Many people view reading as a necessity or burden, they read not because they want to but because they have to. But a handful of people, throughout life, unleash the importance of reading and writing when they put aside those stubborn ways. Reading and writing cannot exist without each, they are compatible as water is to life, they're meant to be with each other. Not until later on in life, Richard Rodriguez, the author of "The Lonely, Good Company of Books" realized that aspect. Rodriguez grew up in a household with parents who didn't believe that reading was essential. As a result, he mimicked this bad habit from his parents, he felt that reading was lonely and only a chore. Until his teacher took the time to read to him so that his reading skills improve. Then that is when he felt a personal connection and that escape reading creates. The autobiography "How I Learned to Read and Write" is a small piece taken from the book *Narrative of the Life Of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass. It's an universal literacy from when Frederick Douglass was a slave, he taught the reader the history of how he learned to read and write, he's believes that education is the key to freedom, and how slavery impacted both slaves and slave masters. The two authors, Richard Rodriguez and Frederick Douglass, evolution of literacy started with no knowledge of what reading and writing holds but then progressed into one of the most important things that impacted their lives. Throughout my evolution of literacy, for me, inspired me to dream, gave an escape and helped me to fully express myself. As well as, freed my closed mind frame from the ignorance of society influences.

In the selection "The Lonely, and Good Company Of Books" that's taken from *Hunger Of Memory* by Richard Rodriguez he shares his life story involving his history with books. Rodriguez parents read barley or even thought to consider reading as pleasurable. According to the Rodriguez, describes his parents, " For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible... Their reading consisted of work manuals, prayer books, newspaper, recipes..." ( Rodriguez 293). Since his parents barley or even consider reading as unpleasurable but as an imposition his insights on books was the same as his parents. Richard also struggled with how books can help you learn and could potentially be your friend. He was later put into remedial reading classes. This is when he started to view books in a whole different way, he said, "A book could open doors for me I could introduce me to people and show me places I never imagined existed"( Rodriguez 194). Reading stimulated Rodriguez imagination that he never thought was there. According to the text, " In spite of my earnest, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books " (Rodriguez 296 ). He finally fought the enjoyment of reading books. As he learned how to read better and what reading really consisted of and its content. With the help of his teacher nun, he began to love it and read constantly. For the author Richard Rodriguez he states, " My habit of reading made me a confident speaker and writer to English. Reading also enable me to sense something of the shape, the major concerns, Western thought" (296). Reading molded how he interpreted and thought of the Western world. Thanks to reading, Rodriguez learned to love what books had to offer like the material and imagination, also enjoy reading them throughout his life.

Through books reading provides me with sense of educational purposes and a sense of pleasure. At first I didn't like to read but through time I began to develop an interest. At the same time, the physical part of reading still bothered me. The exact same feeling Rodriguez had for reading, I can relate to him also because of our backgrounds. Both Richard and my childhood is very similar, my parents really didn't read books to read for fun either. They took reading as an obligation in their work and daily lives. My parents will sometimes read the incoming mail for bills, for recipes, for sports, but they will never read for pleasure. I started to possess the same entities but just has Rodriguez, my academic life had a very positive effect. When I went to school we would read books in class for free time or as a whole class for storytime. When I was in elementary school my fifth grade teacher Ms. Smith would take us to the school library at least twice a month to pick out books. After we were finished with the books, we would write about them in our journals then back to the library for new books. I remember picking out nothing but adventure books because reading them put me in the characters' place so whatever the character of the book would feel and do, I felt in my heart and saw through my eyes. When I read the stories imagery captivates me, that seem to make that horrible physical feeling of reading vanish. This is when I started to see why people loved books so much, because they can help influence your imagination, expand your mind to many perspectives and also help you escape your subconscious. Books and journals provided me with escape from the world I live in.

In the selected piece "How I Learned to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass shows how Frederick taught himself how to read and write, the upbringings of how he understood what the meaning of slavery was and how it could be obliterated. At the beginning, of "How I Learned to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass, the slave master's mistress taught Frederick his ABCs which was the start of Douglass's literacy. Once the slave master found that his wife was teaching Frederick, he was unhappy and told her to stop immediately so of course she had to obey his rules. Mr. Auld believe educated slaves had no value, he explains:

...If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) [Frederick Douglass] how to read, there will 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, he could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. It will make him discontented and unhappy (Douglass 270).

Douglass would later fully understand the words of his master, this explained what all slaves failed understand and realize. In addition, how the white man's power to enslave blacks (African slaves) worked, by which meant to keep them ignorant from the whole idea of slavery. After Mrs. Auld stopped teaching Douglass his alphabets, she became even more harsh than her husband with this knowledge. Due to the fact of the thought that she was superior over him and all the other slaves, they were minorities under her and she grew "big head". Douglass set out to continue teaching himself how to read and write without a teacher. His knowledge grew and for Mrs. Auld actions, he explains:

Slavery proved as injurious to her as he did to me. When I went there, she was a pious, warm, tender-hearted woman... so provide its [slavery] ability to develop her of her heavenly qualities. Under its [slavery] influence, did tender heart became stone, and the lamblike this disposition gave way to one of tiger like fierceness (Douglass 271-272).

The author shows that slavery was unhealthy for both slaves and slave owners. Slaves were being treated unfairly and harsh, as well as, slave owners developed that sensation of superior and inferior treatment towards people (mostly slaves). As Douglass gained knowledge his comprehension increased as well. He developed strategies along way to help teach himself how to read. One tactic he used was to bribe the white poor children with bread, “ This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who in return, would give me the more valuable bread of knowledge”(Douglass 272). Douglass played games with the young children his age, unknowingly, as a deception to teach him how to read and write. As Douglass gained more knowledge on how to read and write he also gained a powerful key that would help him get out of slavery. He learned that if a slave was educated, the idea of slavery to the slave master would corrupt a good slave and grant him his freedom and that’s what happened to Frederick Douglass. Learning to read and write gave Douglass the comprehension and knowledge to fight the oppression of slavery.

As a society, we let media influence our relation with literature. The media acts on today's society like slavery acts on slaves as a barrier to knowledge. As social media and technology grabs the attention of people all over the world, it deprives the interest for books. I would be on my phone watching ads or reading silly memes with no purpose to them or just false information throughout my whole day. Books provide opportunity to learn facts. I was stunned when I read my biology book about the human body and disease, the book had resources that proved facts. Whereas, the media has facts to but with combination of statements, opinions and stereotypes just about anything you can think of which makes it hard to find the truth. Also the things people want us to believe can be false from the media. I really enjoy reading Douglass’s section because, first off, Douglass gave me the knowledge of what slavery really meant through his experience that he shared in his writing. I really didn’t know that slavery consist of education withdraws. The slaves didn’t have the education to analyze, think, speak for themselves; that was the whole idea of slavery. Somewhat like the media has on people but more through giving false information. Since Douglass was full of ambition, he set out to teach himself how to read by any means and with that he gain the knowledge and the comprehension from reading. It cleared his blurry vision on things that was going on in his time. I thought slavery had just consisted of cruelty of the white people on slaves (black people). Douglass help me to see-through the eyes of a slave and the events he had went through to overcome the difficulties of slavery through writing. I use to hate reading but when I read a piece like Douglass’s, it makes me look at reading and writing as the power to know the truth.

Richard Rodriguez author of “The Lonely, Good Company of Books” and Frederick Douglass the author of “How I Learned to Read and Write”, at first did not know reading and writing would release the ignorance that hindered them. Learning how to read and write enabled Richard Rodriguez to overcome his fear of silence and launched his imagination. For Frederick Douglass, reading and writing freed his imprisoned mind from slavery and gave him the sense to end it all together. Reading and writing was hard at first but later gave an escape from my harsh realities, enhanced my imaginations, and gave me knowledge to grasp mentally and understand complicated ideas and the media. Reading and writing can unleash your hidden qualities you never thought existed, you just have to try.

Douglass, Frederick. "How I Learned to Read and Write." *Introduction to College Writing*, McGraw Hill 2010, pp 270-276.

Rodriguez, Richard. "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." *Introduction to College Writing*, McGraw Hill 2010, pp

## **Escaping Reality**

### **Miranda Merritt**

Reading isn't for everyone. Some love to read, and others despise it. My mother read to me when I was younger, and she would also read for pleasure as well. I remember the bright vibrant colors from the picture books she read to me, and how those pictures would bring the stories to life. I have always enjoyed reading and writing. Even though writing hasn't been my strongest trait I still enjoy writing. In the essay, "The Love of Books" Gloria Naylor expresses her love of books, and how writing saved her life by writing down her feelings in her diary that her mother gave her. Like Naylor, writing down my feelings helped me to cope with my depression, and reading books gave me an opportunity to escape reality. In the essay, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books" Richard Rodriguez describes how his parents read as a chore. He found the good company of books when his teacher read to him and he was able to drift away from reality from listening to the words. Rodriguez realized then that reading wasn't a chore at all. It was in fact a way to escape, and also a way to educate himself. Unlike Rodriguez, I never found reading as a chore, but like Rodriguez, reading allows me to drift into different worlds, as if I am reading my own story. Reading and writing isn't for everyone, but for me writing has helped me to voice my thoughts, and reading allows me to drift to different realities.

As reading and writing became passions for me, making friends didn't seem to be one. I have always been shy and quite in school. I wasn't the nerdy kid with glasses that would sit on the playground and read books by any means, but I was the kid on the playground who only played with one friend, or alone. Since I was shy it was hard for me to make new friends. It became a task I couldn't grasp. I was normally either the last one picked, or close to the last one during gym, or kickball at recess. Like Naylor, my shyness affected my education. In her essay, Naylor quotes, "My shyness kept me from communicating verbally, to the point that my teachers thought perhaps I was slow. The theory of education in those years—the fifties and early sixties—held that a well-rounded child participated in class. That meant raising your hand, which for a child like me meant to break out in a cold sweat. The idea that I had to step forth and give voice to something was a nightmare" (228). Naylor describes how terrifying it was for her to participate in class. Her shyness kept her from communicating to others, and in front of others. Even though, she was very smart her teachers believed that perhaps she could've been slow. My shyness has also kept me from communicating. It's hard for me to speak in front of others. When I am required to give a speech in front of an audience my heart races, and I start to sweat just like Naylor when she would raise her hand. I also don't like to raise my hand. Even if I know the answer there's something about having to speak in front of the class that terrifies me. When Naylor describes how reading and writing saved her life, it made me realize that it saved mine as well.

For some who are shy like I am, it's difficult to speak in front of others, so I decided to write my feelings down. I received my first diary when I was twelve years old as a Christmas present. My parents didn't know at the time, and neither did I that the diary "Santa" brought for me would help me cope with depression, and save my life. Naylor quotes, "Through the luck of the draw of having a very wise and perceptive mother who happened to match what I needed with the gift of that diary, my life was saved. Because those feelings were going to come out. I



was going to speak one day” (228). Naylor’s life was saved because her mother knew exactly what she needed to be able to open up through writing. Like Naylor, it’s hard for me to open up to others, especially my parents. Once I started writing in my diary I felt as if a huge amount of weight had been lifted off my shoulders. I was able to say what I needed to say without feeling judged. My diary became my safe place and my counselor. Since I was shy in school, it was hard for me to make friends. I remember jokes made towards me, and questions asked out of disgust because my hair is thicker and darker than the other kids. Since I have Mexican heritage I became a target for judgement. I couldn’t bring myself to tell my parents, so I wrote about it instead. I am the oldest of three, so my parents expected more from me than my siblings. I was never able to meet their expectations at least, that’s how I felt. Writing in my diary became my way of voicing my feelings, and thoughts. For Naylor, she was able to voice her thoughts, and feelings as well which ended up saving her life. In her essay, Naylor says, “Whatever went into those original pages are not eternal keepsakes, they are not classic thoughts, but they were my feelings, it was my pain, and the pain was real to me at twelve years old” (228). Naylor’s pain was real at twelve years old, and the only way for her to express her feelings was through writing. For me it was easier to write how I felt instead of saying it out loud. Writing saved my life without me even knowing it. I was able to express myself, and get through my struggles with depression.

While writing in my diary helped me to express my thoughts, reading opened different worlds for me. I have always enjoyed reading. Once I was able to read on my own I was able to escape to different worlds. In the essay “The Lonely, Good Company of Books” Rodriguez says, “A book could open doors for me. It could introduce me to people and show me places I never imagined existed” (294). Rodriguez thought reading was only a chore. He didn’t see the gift that reading could bring until his teacher explained to him that reading could open doors he never knew existed. Reading and learning go hand in hand, just like reading and writing. For me reading was my opportunity to escape reality. After dinner and homework, I would lie on my bed and read. I didn’t see reading as lonely; instead I saw it as relaxing. Sometimes I would read until I fell asleep. I used reading as my way to escape to my quiet place, which was inside a book. Rodriguez writes, “I loved the feeling I got—after the first hundred pages—of being at home in a fictional world where I knew the names of the characters and cared about was going to happen to them. And it bothered me that I was forced away at the conclusion, when the fiction closed tight, like a fortune-teller’s fist—the futures of all the major characters neatly resolved” (296). Rodriguez could drift away to different realities he pictured in his mind. I am able to picture different worlds as well. When I read a good book I am able to picture myself in the story. The world around me pauses for a moment while I step into a different reality. In his essay, Rodriguez says, “In spite of my earnestness 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” (296). Rodriguez came to realize that reading was by far a chore like his parents thought it was. He came to enjoy reading, and realized that reading would in fact teach him and open different worlds for him. He once saw reading as lonely, but came to enjoy that loneliness. I have never thought of reading as lonely. For me reading has always been peaceful. It allows me to escape my own reality and step into another just for a little while. I

believe that those who don't like to read haven't read the right book yet. Reading doesn't have to be chore, it's an opportunity to use an imagination that as adults isn't used as much.

Reading and writing doesn't have to be a chore. I believe that reading and writing go hand in hand. Those who love to write, but don't enjoy reading don't realize that reading comes with writing. It's like a couple who walk holding hands wherever they go. To be a writer means having to read others writings, as well as your own. Doing one or the other just doesn't work. I believe that once others realize that both is necessary for our everyday lives then the better off they will be. For some it's hard to see the enjoyment in reading or writing, but for me I not only found enjoyment. I found a way to save myself, and a way to open new worlds. Even though, some love to read and write, while others despise it. For me writing helped me cope with depression I wasn't aware I had until early in my adulthood. While reading gave me the opportunity to open new doors to new worlds of realities.

Rodriguez, Richard. "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." Introduction to College Writing. 6th Ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2010. 293-297. Print.

Naylor, Gloria. "The Love of Books." Introduction to College Writing. 4th Ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2010. 225-231. Print.

## **Defining Literacy**

### **Demetrius Pittman**

Reflecting on how I've improved my engagement with reading, writing, and learning, it's extremely difficult to pinpoint multiple experiences that I have towards improving said skills. Although having an education is essential to becoming successful, I faintly remember discovering a passion for reading. Similar to Richard Rodriguez, teacher, editor, journalist for PBS, and American writer of the essay "The Lonely, Good Company of Books", I was raised in a household where reading for fun wasn't as normal as maybe watching television. This similarity is just one of few ways that Rodriguez and I connect, on an academic development level. Rodriguez and I shared similar households where our parents lacked reading enforcement, but knowing the importance of literacy and finding inspiration from the people we looked up to, helped us to become more passionate readers.

Developing stronger reading skills and staying engaged with reading were challenges that Rodriguez and I faced. Reading was never a brand new concept for us, but it was an area of weakness. Looking back to when reading was introduced to me, I remember believing that it was scary. Reading encompasses a lot of ideas and topics. Ideas and topics that are based around the ability to interpret readings. I understood the intent behind reading, but I couldn't bring myself to liking it. While reading to myself, I would oftentimes be distracted by my own thoughts. Thoughts of doing it wrong, or thoughts of grasping the main purpose improperly. My thoughts while reading could be compared to television, both are entertaining but are distracting. When I read to myself, I am alone, and with only my mind at work I oftentimes would get bored. Once I felt a sense of boredom with reading, that's when my distracting thoughts would come to play. The isolation and loneliness that comes with reading heavily affected my drive towards reading. When reading to myself, I would lose focus, and would eventually give up on regaining that focus. Similarly, Rodriguez also felt very isolated when reading. He wrote "What most bothered me, however, was the isolation reading required. To console myself for the loneliness I'd feel when I read, I tried reading in a very soft voice" (294). Attempting to change how lonely he felt when reading to himself, he would read out loud quietly. Having feelings of loneliness while reading to himself distracted him in the same way that it distracted me

The good habits that children are introduced to usually are habits that they carry with them throughout their life. Having that my parents had a hands off approach towards reading, I grew into a habit of putting reading at the bottom of my priorities list. I haven't put much thought into how much of an affect reading could have on my future. I rarely picked up a book unless it was for completing school assignments because I didn't have a natural drive towards reading. A possible reasoning behind that is from me rarely seeing my parents read anything other than letters in the mail. The distant relationship that my parents had with reading rubbed off on me and made me more distant with reading as well. Similarly, Rodriguez also picked up on his parent's distant relations with reading. Rodriguez wrote "For both my parents, however, 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). The image that his parents portrayed was a negative image that influenced his poor reading habits. If Rodriguez had a little more TLC from his parents about reading, then it could easily be argued that Rodriguez

would've had better reading habits from early on. Being that his parent's reading habits were poor, it naturally drove Rodriguez to look up to the first person he knew that was heavily engaged with reading.

Developing a want and passion for reading can be hard when it's not introduced during early childhood. During my childhood, I sometimes would find my mother reading during late night hours. Most of the books that my mother read were books based on women satisfaction, and relationships. Her late night reading sessions made me wonder why someone who worked as hard as she did would want to read during those hours instead of sleep. After my fifth time seeing my mother reading during late night hours, I began to ponder on why reading was so captivating for her. My oblivious mind knew that she had to like reading because it was a continuous activity for her. My mother was driven back night after night because of the satisfaction that she felt from reading. Her satisfaction with reading made me feel left out or like I was missing something. I felt left out because whenever I would pick up a book, I would instantly lose focus and surrender. Curiously, I wanted know why it was easier for her to read her book than for me to read mine. The difference was that her books could grab her attention, whereas the books I attempted to read couldn't grab mine. That was until I was introduced to the Twilight Saga. I could naturally feel myself get engaged in this book series because it contained two of my favorite creatures: vampires and werewolves. After reading the first book in the Twilight Saga series I began to feel a lot more passionate about reading. Similarly, Rodriguez too didn't always have a strong passion for reading. Rodriguez looked to a nun at his school the same way that I looked to my mother. The nun was very passionate about reading, and she was eager to share her passions. Rodriguez wrote "Playfully [the nun] ran through complex sentences, calling the words alive with her voice, making it seem that the author somehow was speaking directly to me" (294). Rodriguez enjoyed the reading sessions with the nun because of her deep engagement with reading. The nun's ability to make reading fun for him was beneficial towards his passion for reading. Rodriguez and I were capable of developing a want for reading from the people that we looked up to.

It could be assumed that being able to read well is a skill that is taught since birth. Although it is a skill that we use all the time, it is still possible to not know how to do it well. Rodriguez and I weren't always strong readers, and part of this problem was not having it introduced to us as much as it should have in our childhoods. After developing a passion for reading, I would often wonder why must I be able to read well before I can say that I am an educated citizen? Unfortunately, that question remained unanswered until high school. In high school, I had a teacher that helped me come to a consensus that reading is a part of everyday life. Before I attended high school, I knew being able to read well would be helpful but I didn't know why it would be so helpful. Navigating a day would be impossible without being able to read, and using this generalization I began to dig deeper into the concept. There are millions and millions of books, all written by authors with visions. Visions of spreading knowledge or even humor. These books tell stories, make connections, and portray concepts that are very essential in everyday life. Similar to my discovery of literacy importance, Rodriguez was able to crack the code to becoming literate. He too pondered on the importance of reading. He wrote "What did I see in my books? I had the idea that they were crucial for my academic success, though I

couldn't have said exactly how or why" (295). Reflecting on why reading held such great value, Rodriguez came to a consensus that books have themes or major ideas that are helpful in life. Being knowledgeable enough to distinguish the themes or main ideas require a certain kind of skill, a skill that helps with analyzations. Using our ability to question, Rodriguez and I both questioned the idea behind being literate. We received more than just an answer to our question, we received enlightenment over the entire concept.

Overall, coming from a household that seldomly read books heavily affected Rodriguez and I. Having similar backgrounds with reading, we discovered the importance of literacy and found role models for reading. We also found ways to cope with reading, we didn't have parental force, we discovered a drive late in life, but we knew that it was necessary to find a love for reading. The experiences from childhood don't always leave a lasting effect. Not having a strong reading figure in childhood affected Rodriguez and me, but we found ways to overcome it.

Rodriguez, Richard. "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." Introduction to College Writing: English 100. 6th ed. Ed. Missouri Western State University Department of English, Foreign Languages, and Journalism. McGraw-Hill, 2000, pp. 293-297.

## **Mediocre America**

**Abe K. Scott**

When I look at the state of America's education system it is hard to view it as much more than mediocre. We lost focus of what is important at some point, and the value of knowledge has lost its significance to Americans. We base our achievements on the ability to obtain money and status. This kind of backwards thinking has led to our standards in the classroom to subside over the years, and our countries global rank in education reflects this. We rank near the middle of the pack globally in math, science, and language arts, and our commitment to change this is fading. We need to start making better choices in America, and this must start with setting goals that insure educational progress in America's youth. Chester E. Finn, Jr.'s view point on goals in "A Nation Still at Risk" are much like mine, and that is why I decided to cite many of his findings in my attempt to convince everyone to be a little less ignorant. Education in America is dreadful because most people are in denial or too proud to see the issues within the system, we also lack any goals that insure progress, and we resist change whenever we are presented with it.

One of the key contributors to the struggles in American education is that parents are in denial that our children are not reaching their full potential, and we are too proud to admit that we have anything to do with it. Even though many studies show that American children score low in almost every educational category when compared to the rest of the world. Finn points out, "There is one category we are ranked highest in, and that is "self-regard" (246). As presented by "A Nation Still at Risk," Harold W. Stevenson performed a study on how mothers view the effectiveness of the schools educating their children, his findings were this, "American mothers were very positive: 91 percent judge the schools as doing an "excellent" or "good" job" (Finn 246). Stevenson found that when the same question was asked to countries leading the world in education, they were far less impressed with how their schools were performing, "...Chinese mothers (42 percent) and Japanese mothers (39 percent) ..." (Finn 246). This leads me to believe that even though we continue to churn out mediocre results globally, we dismiss the claim that we could be doing more to improve nationally. We are far too arrogant and prideful to except that we are providing a low level of education to our children. It is clear to me that if we do not change our mindset on how we perform in education, we will continue to promote ignorance in America.

Another trend in American education is band-aid solutions for temporary results, and not setting goals that provide long-term stability and insure progress in American education. Before we can attempt to implement goals in the classrooms we need to identify the practices that have been working for the nation's leading the way in education. I think we should set goals on changing the three areas we differ most in from other countries like, longer school years, more time spent doing homework, and reviewing time management practices in the classroom (Finn 248). In the article A Nation Still at Risk the author states, "These three failings are grave" (Finn 248). He then goes on to say "Unchanged, they will keep us from making significant educational gains" (Finn, 248). I believe that Finn's opinion is an accurate one, and the result for our relaxed culture could prevent America from ever gaining any ground in the race for higher learning. While changing these three aspects in the school system would surely result in an out pour of negative feedback from parents and students alike, I personally think that is a side effect that we

will just have to deal with and ignore. After all, if parents such as myself were so smart in the first place, these goals wouldn't have to be goals at all. They would just be common practice.

This is what leads me to another immense issue that cripples our educational development in America, and that is our willingness to accept change when we are presented with it. Chester E. Finn Jr. acknowledges this challenge in "A Nation Still at Risk" and insinuates that the change of process itself is rather simple, but changing the way our culture thinks in America is the largest road block to educational progress. According to Finn "Changing the culture of any large enterprise is far more difficult than altering the specific policies by which it operates" (254). The United States begs for change when we see something that we don't agree with in society. The difficulties we face today when presented with a viable solution to the education crisis, is that Americans lack trust in the individuals providing the solution. The person appointed to present the resolution to the public is usually a lawmaker, politician, and in many cases a school board official. This individual may have a poor track record or political view that could keep voters from supporting the plan even if it has potential to be successful. Citizens often put too much focus on the failures of previous regimes and believe that their successors will fall short on resolving many of the same issues. This has made it almost impossible to gain any kind of ground in America's education. I honestly can't say that I blame anyone for the negative feelings they have towards their political leaders. At some point we will need to let go of the hatred we have for our government, because it has crippled us from making progress in education for far too long. If we don't rise to our feet and unite as a country, we can only blame ourselves for prolonging change in America's school system.

Many of the issues outlined in "A Nation Still at Risk" hold true to the same issues we see in America today. I feel like resolving the issues we have with education would directly affect the way future generation's deal with the mountain of other problems they will face in their lifetime. We must review other countries successes and set our pride aside and make changes that support progress in the future. It is the only way to protect our country from an undeniable certainty of a more ignorant tomorrow. The unfortunate reality is that most of us uneducated Americans lack the attitude and intelligence to make these logical choices, so we should count on what we have been good at for so long, and that is mediocracy. That is why education in America is dreadful, because most people are in denial or too proud to see the issues within the system, we also lack any goals that insure progress, and we resist change whenever we are presented with it.

Finn Jr., Chester. *A Nation Still at Risk*. Introduction to College Writing, edited by Lynn

Nagel, Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc, 2010, 241-255.

## **Power of Decisions**

### **Julia Thompson**

In *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore we learn about the lives of two boy by the same name, Wes Moore. Both boys grew up in similar environments in low income neighborhoods and with rising drug issues. Throughout their younger years they both struggled with the responsibilities of school and wanting to fit in with the people and environment around them. They didn't always make the greatest decisions when facing these issues. Over the years to come they faced several more problems similar to when they were children and all new hardships. The decisions they made during these times had huge effects on their lives, good and bad. Not only did they affect their lives, it affected those around them. The decisions you make and the decisions of those around you can have drastic changes on the outcome of your life and how you will get there.

Throughout the life of Wes one, the author, many decisions of his family and his own changed the course of his future. One of these choices was his mothers. She decided to move the family, Wes and his sisters, to her parent's town and home in the Bronx hoping to make a positive change for the family after the passing of her husband. As soon as they move to the new town Joy saw the changes the neighborhood had taken, witnessing a drug deal. It was not as she remembered and had started to crumble to the poverty and drugs surrounding it. Upon noticing the neighborhood Joy decided to try and give Wes his best chance in school and sent him to the prestigious private school across town. Though her choice had the opposite effect on young Wes because the young boy was now stuck between two worlds, "I was becoming too "rich" for the kids from the neighborhood and too "poor" for the kids in school" (Moore 53). In response to this struggle Wes chose the easier option, to not try. Wes started failing academically and would miss classes. He was suspended for rough housing and instead changed the story to impress his neighborhood friends and told them how he beat up another boy for disrespecting him. His choices so far had not been for the better and were leading him into a harsh path. His mother was making constant threats to send him to a military school if he didn't improve and Wes never took the threats seriously. He realized firsthand how serious she was when he was goofing off one night and accidentally bloodied his sister's lip. That evening his mother had been on the phone with his dean discussing Wes's academic and disciplinary probation making the final decision clear, Wes was going to Valley Forge Military School.

During Wes ones first, few days at Valley Forge he was extremely disobedient. He refused to follow the rules they had in place and showed no respect for the sergeants in charge of him. He had no desire to stay there let alone follow their rules and regulations, "By the end of the fourth day at military school, I had run away four times." (Moore 90). Wes was anything but cooperative with the idea of taking advantage of this and reforming himself so when one of the sergeant gave him a map to the train station he had no hesitation in taking it. He followed that map through the woods for a while before realizing it was fake and then he cried. The sergeant who had given him the fake map appeared and took him to the colonel who gave him one last call to his family. Wes took this call as an opportunity to beg his mother to come home swearing he'd do better but she responded, "Wes, you are not going anywhere until you give this place a try. I am so proud of you, and your father is proud of you, and we just want you to give this a



shot.” (Joy 95). He was lead back to his room for a few hours of sleep before morning alarms. After that night Wes took notice to the new world around him, the chain of command and the respect. He decided to take his chance with this school. When time went by and he was older and presented with a violent, racist man he made a choice different from the time as a child. He stopped and thought of his family, his mother and father, and he chose not to fight but to leave. He continued his stay at Valley Forge Military School wanting to go to their junior college stating, “I started to think seriously about how I could become the person I wanted to be.”, (Moore 132). His mother Joy made that hard-final decision to send him away to military school to give him the opportunity to leave the path he was on. He made the decisions there to accept what the military school offered, a total reform and future education. His mother’s choices helped lead him to the decisions that shaped his life.

My family tried a lot to help me change the path I was on when I was younger just as Wes’s mother, Joy, had done for him. The crime in my neighborhood growing up wasn’t as obvious and dangerous as it was for Wes growing up, but it was bad nonetheless. I didn’t live in a nice house or a nice neighborhood, even into my early teens I shared a bunk bed in a cramped room with my brother. Our neighborhood wasn’t considered safe and many robberies and shootings happened at the park a few blocks behind our house. Two houses up from ours was a home full of drug addicts and dealers. I still remember the first bad deal I saw go down when two guys chased a third one down the road with bats. I didn’t take it exactly as a warning and still hung around these people and the others they brought around, desperate to fit in with the people I considered cool. As time went on I made more and more choices to try to fit in with these people taking up smoking, hiding away in the trees behind my house. I would miss classes for days on end to go hang out in shady house and sneak out at night to do the same. My behaviors eventually earned me a probation officer to supervise my school attendance and out of school activities. I saw it more as a challenge, I just earned an extra barrier to sneak around and when successful I felt more invigorated by what I was doing. My behaviors were eventually caught though, as they always are, and this time I got a trip to Buchanan County Academy.

The live-in school wasn’t quite a military school like it had been back in the day it was more of a reform school, reform I wasn’t willing to accept. I watched several kids run away and end up in shackles and lots of girls attempt to assault one another and the officers and end up maced. When I was there I was given the opportunity to leave earlier than most, but I only pretended to have improved my behaviors. I didn’t want the mace and I didn’t want to be there for ages, so I did what I was told obediently every day and was thinking of ways I could use this to my advantage when I left. I never took a chance on the thought of actually improving myself. So, when I was finally able to leave I left with strategies on how to get away with everything better than before. Within weeks of leaving BCA I was missing classes and acting out again. I was caught in my behaviors after a near death experience and was sent to a rehab facility an hour away from home. I listened to endless speeches from AA and NA groups and constant tale son the downslope we were all on. I hated every one of those meeting, and still do, I still can’t remember the NA/AA rules nor any of the advice these people tried to give. I do remember my young self-sitting there and taking their stories as advice on how to not get caught and how to avoid the consequences but continue my actions. I spent my time there the same as I did BCA, I

behaved well enough to get to leave but never let them actually help me. When I finally left it only took a matter of days for me to get back into my old ways and this time I dove even deeper in the more dangerous parts of the world they were trying to get me to avoid. I was given many chances when I was younger from the people around me, I had a lot of support surprisingly, and I shook it all away. I never took advantage of the systems that tried to help me like Wes one had.

I feel like throughout these stories I relate more to the other Wes, Wes two, when growing up. He ended up making a lot of decisions in his life based off of how easy it would be to do, no matter the consequences and never learning from the mistakes. His mother, Mary, tried hard to get herself a college education, but in 1982 there was a cut to the education's budget and Mary's grants were terminated. She felt this ruined all chances of her continuing her college career. Young Wes saw himself as his mother's protector and offered to work and support her, "Mary laughed. You can work later and make money." (Mary 23). He watched his brother Tony, who spent most his time with his father, rise up in the drug game as a boy. Tony constantly encouraged Wes to do better for himself, to stick with his education but Wes ignored Tony's, "Do as I say not as I do", tirades." (Moore 27). He chose to slack off academically and misbehave. One day when playing football with other boys from the neighborhood one of the boys confronted him over his pushing during the game and the boy punched him. Wes thought of what his brother had said before, "Rule number one: If someone disrespects you, you send a message so fierce that they won't have the chance to do it again.", (Tony 33). Wes two ended up in jail for the first time that night because he went home and came back for the boy with a knife.

His mother, Mary, didn't learn of this incident for years to come but she decided to move them to a place called Dundee Village. She hoped by moving out there it would be a new start and chance for Wes after he had failed the 6th grade. Not long after moving to this neighborhood Wes saw a boy standing on a street corner, He thought what the boy was wearing was the coolest he had ever seen and asked him how he could get the getup too. The boy told him all he had to do was notify them when the cops were near, and they would pay him. He knew what it was, "It was the same game that had consumed Tony and put a bullet or two in him." (Moore 58). Wes chose to do it anyways and rationalized, "I'm not actually selling drugs." (Moore 58). He made lots of money from this and lied to his family saying the money came from him being a DJ. Wes faced the constant anger of his brother about his choices of going into the game and not continuing his education until Tony finally gave up on Wes ever turning around and going back. This followed in time as Wes did in fact make worse choices and during his girlfriend's pregnancy he chose to cheat on her. The woman he slept with was also seeing someone and this led into Wes two having a fight with the man, which he brought a gun. He chased and shot the man and it led to him in jail for attempted murder.

Wes two's choices led his life into a spiral deeper into the drug game. He even fought with it at home when he found out the addiction of the mother of two of his children. It made him upset and sick to see it in his own home. He wanted out and attempted to do so by going to Job Corps. He tried his hardest there. He completed his academic course work and selected carpentry for a vocational specialty. He worked hard at Job Corps and completed it successfully. "These past few months had been the most important and enjoyable in Wes's life." (Moore 143).

He worked many jobs after leaving Job Corps and struggled with the low income. The toll was hard on him to support himself and try to support his mother who took care of his children. He walked through his old neighborhood, his old selling grounds, and when he was home he had a bag of cocaine. Eventually the choices Wes two made lead to where he is today, life in prison for murder.

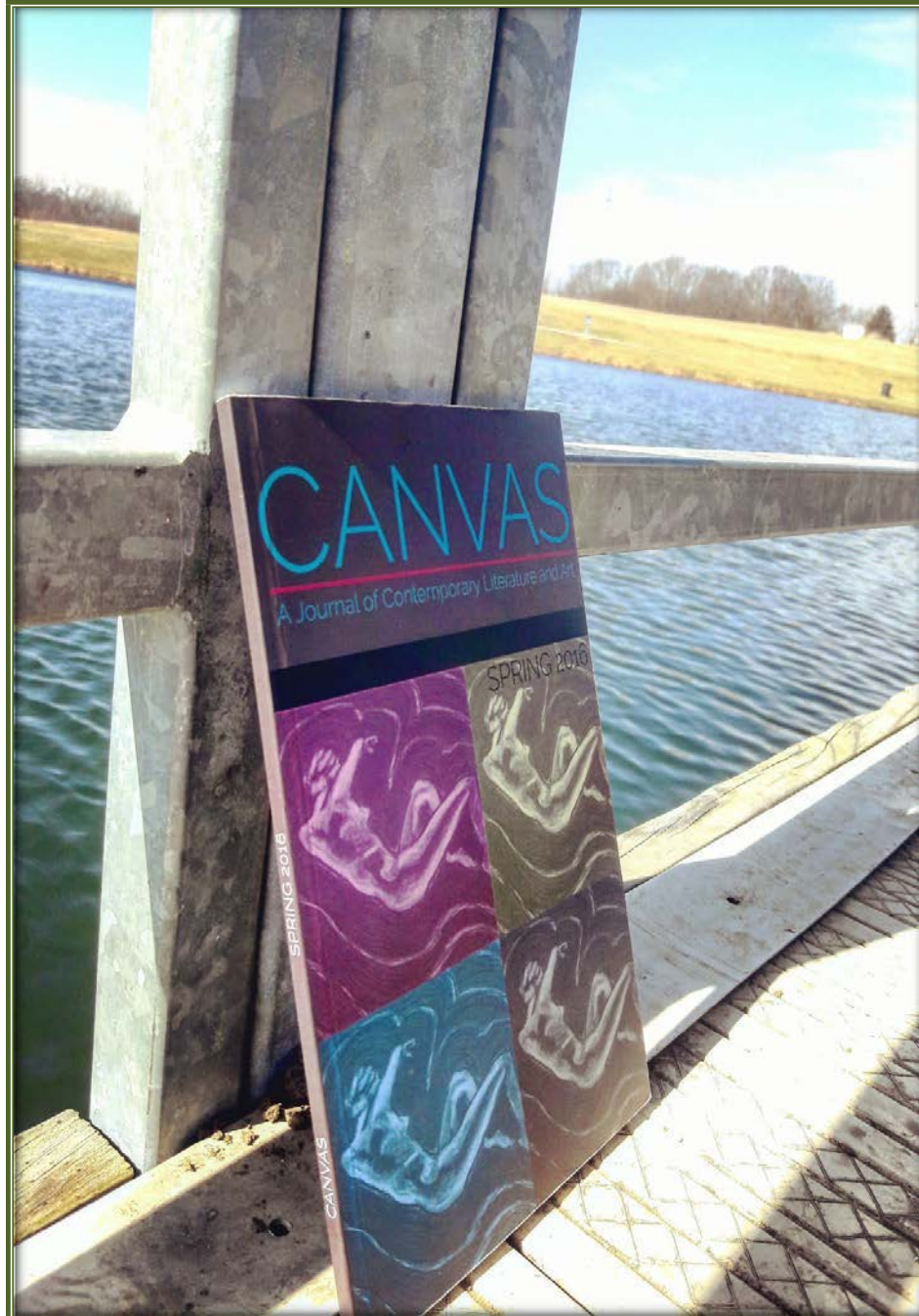
I refused to take on the opportunities of reforming and self-improvement by the systems the people around me had offered so, after I had finished high school I moved out of my home into a friend's home, a trap house. I ended up living there for two years. I still spoke to my family, but they had no idea what I was actually doing. I spent my time with the guy I was dating on and off, walking through town to find people to sell to. We'd walk across town several times a night to meet up with people even in the winter. More than once I found myself mixed in a situation of violence, watching men get jumped and beat until they ended up in the hospital. I also in jail a number of times, each more uncomfortable than the last. I was always scared I'd end up staying there but never cared to change when I left. It's a time in my life I don't particularly care to think back on and can never understand why I wanted to be in that kind of situation in the first place. I look back now and realize how many times I was in life threatening danger. I spent my time back then complaining about how unfair everything was and how I couldn't afford what I wanted. I blamed the people who wouldn't hire me and the stores that made everything more than I could afford. I refused to try and better myself to find a job and accept that the situation I was in was my own fault. I was in that house doing deals every day for two years. Some days I'd black out and I wouldn't come to until the next day. One day I woke up though and all I could see was the roaches running along the cracked wall and feel the pain in my toes as they froze. I realized how sick I was of this life around me. I wanted a home where I could start a family, a place I wasn't scared of freezing in or having bugs crawling all around me. I wanted to find something to do with my day other than hustle people out of their money, so we could all sit in a stupor staring at the walls. I was sick of being afraid. Within a week of that day I secretly moved all my stuff back to my grandmothers and left my boyfriend after 3 years of our bad spiraling relationship. I quit all of my bad habits and started over new for myself and got my first actual job. It wasn't easy to get use to and one of the hardest times of my life not only getting use to the complete lifestyle change but because my boyfriend stalked me for weeks. He made me question my choices and kept offering me money to come back to him. I can still remember how scared I was when I would get up in the night to use the bathroom and he would just be standing in the alley messaging me. I felt like it would never stoop, and it would just be easier to go back, but in the back of my head I knew that's exactly what it was, easy. I didn't screw my life up in a day, it would take time and lots of effort to get where I wanted to be, and I couldn't let this struggle be what stopped me from all the progress I made. I was right because after a few weeks he stopped showing up and I blocked him from all ways I could. Now I'm on the path to becoming something I never thought was possible for me, a doctor.

I really enjoyed this novel and it really showed me the effects choices you make can have on your life. Wes one could have chosen to refuse accepting the system at Valley Forge Military School or chose to fight the man who assaulted him and ended up back as delinquent with no care for the future. Just as Wes two could have stuck with what he learned through Job Corps

and worked hard for his future instead of giving up. He chose the easier route and is now spending the rest of his life in prison for his mistakes. I refused the help given to me by the systems I was put in and ended up in horrible situations because of it but eventually I realized it wasn't too late and could leave the surroundings I was in no matter how hard it was going to be. When I started reading this novel I connected the most with Wes two based on his decisions that always lead him downhill and effected his life and the lives around him negatively. He had no cares to improve his future beyond getting what he wanted when he wanted. I was a lot like that before; I would do whatever I wanted just because I felt like I. Who cares how it turns out? Eventually I realized the error in the choices I was making and how it could hurt myself and my family in the future. I decided to change so I could be a help to my family instead of the burden, no matter how hard it was going to be. A choice Wes two presented himself with and gave upon. As I made my way through the book I realized how much I want to continue down my path of choices and become someone better than I thought I could be just like Wes one, "I started to think seriously about how I could become the person I wanted to be." (Moore 132). The choices you make won't always be easy but if you stop and think about where they could lead you it's worth it to try. It takes time to change the course of your life and you can't put off that responsibility on anyone else. Had I taken advantage of the support offered to me as a teenager I might have been on the path I am now a long time ago, but here I am now. I finally stopped to think about where I could end up being in the future. Stuck in a life of drugs and disgust or living a comfortable life with my family. I chose the latter because, it's not too late to try the path may be a little more difficult but the result of your decision will make it work it in the end.

Moore, Wes. *The Other Wes Moore*. Spiegel and Grau, 2011.

# *Stories of Significance*



## **She's up there with the Stars**

### **Kennedy Brock**

*"The Boundaries the divide Life and Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where one ends and the other begins. " -Edgar Allan Poe*

To say I idolized my mother is the understatement of the century, but when you grow 'up the daughter of a professional actress it's hard not to. It's through her I found my love and admiration of theater, and why I can't see myself anywhere but on the stage. People may try to say their mom is "The Best," but for me all the other moms pale in comparison. My mom could walk into the room and warm it with her inviting aura, all while making you feel uniquely special. She never judged you, all she could do was love, She was my best friend, the person that held all of my secrets and made sure I was happy. Last July when I lost her due to a liver disease that no one expected, I found myself back to square one, not to mention lost and unsure of myself.

I don't wish my July 12, 2016 on anyone. Sitting with my back against the cold tile of the KU ICU, I heard my dad tell my mom's two younger sisters he had no other option other than taking her off life support. Standing up, I felt my whole body go numb. As I walked back to the waiting room to check on my little brother Kael, I witnessed him nearly pass out due to hearing mom's body was beginning to shut off. As I hit the door, I heard my dad's voice calling my name telling me to get my siblings, because he needed to talk to us. I swallowed my tears and nodded my head. Making my way into the hot, overpopulated waiting room forced my tears back into my eyes. I waited for my little sister, Karissa, to get up from her hard hospital chair to follow me and helped make sure Kael was steady on his feet. Their eyes filled with tears; I think we all knew it was time to tell our mom goodbye. I feel bad they lost her when they were only fifteen and thirteen, because they didn't get to truly spend time with her the way that I had.

Many of my early memories are the times my mom and I spent alone before my siblings were born. My dad worked two jobs at the time, so the only time I got to see him was on the weekends when he would play outside with our black beach retriever, Susie, and I. During the week, I was all hers, and we did everything a young kid could enjoy. My first drive-in movie was that Adam Sandler movie, "Big Daddy", and to this day, I think she thought I wouldn't remember the movie at all. I'd be lying if I said I didn't, because I honestly remember most of it, I just didn't get most of the jokes. That was until I rewatched it again this summer and I think my jaw fell to the floor around ten times.

One of my most vivid memories from my only child days, was McDonald's. Yes, I know. Wow! That's a great memory every child has! Yet, I think my memory can one-up the very story you have in your head. When I was around four, my dad got a job with Ford, so my mom quickly quit her job and became a stay at home mom, her favorite job. My favorite part of the days were always lunch, because although she stayed home, she always had a play practice to go to as soon as the clock reached five. For a four year old, I had an annoyingly specific order; cheese burger, pickles only, with a lemonade. It's safe to say my OCD started young, but on this day it was extremely bad, because, I, the "angel" had annoyed my mom to the point of frustration wanting that specific burger. We had been in a hurry to go somewhere at the time so she had chosen to go

through the drive-through, her knuckles white as I happily blabbed in the back. I don't blame her for being mad that day, I mean from the moment I had learned to talk I hadn't stopped. So it had to be annoying for anyone. Being blissfully unaware of everything but the fact mom was mad, I happily took the red cardboard box into my hands. Ripping open the paper of my burger, I took a huge bite only to be filled with disgust and sadness. Now to this day, I don't know if it was the person's first day or that they didn't care at all, but when I turned to my mom and let out a sheepish, "There's no patty," I was upset. Her eyes flashed red as she looked at me, holding up my two halves of a bun with a single pickle stuck to them, and forcefully threw the car into a Uturn that I'm still unsure was legal. Slamming into a parking spot, she had me follow her into the McDonald's, as she marched up to the counter. Her face stayed hard as she told the employee that my burger was lacking on the burger. After a beat and a confused look on the cashier's face, she repeated, only this time she burst into a fit of giggles. I watched as her smile lit up the room and soon every person in the store began to laugh as well, me included. She turned to me and smiled giggling, "This is silly." With a smile she took my new burger back, still laughing at how ridiculous the situation was, and I think that was the moment I realized I wanted to be like her when I got older.

My mom was professional actress for most of her life and for awhile I hated it. We would sometimes get stopped in Walmart by people who had just seen a show my mom was in. It's cool to be super proud of your mom all the time, but when you're being followed down aisle five by an old lady begging your mom to do her British accent, it's annoying. I can remember the exact moment when her annoying "job," became my life goal.

It was my first of many Paradise playhouse shows. Paradise is a dinner theater in Excelsior; from the moment you walk in you've been transported to Hawaii. The aroma from the kitchen never failed to get me. The owners Frank and Kathy used to cook dinner for the 100 or so people who would fill the tables of every show. My dad and I grabbed our table in the second tier and waited for the play to start, I was nearly bouncing out of my seat while my dad held a small smile on his face.

My parents had started dating when he was twelve, so this was just another play he happily attended. In the whole time my mom was alive, I don't think my dad missed a single show. The lights around us flickered out as the show started, it was the classic tale of the Odd Couple—The curtains opened to a plume of smoke as a poker game began to take place. The men shouted and raved about their failing marriages over the game, my mom's friend Larry held a pickle tightly as he swung it with his lines to add dramatic emphasis. While animatedly ranting and raving, the pickle slipped from his grasp and into the audience hitting a man on the head. The Audience roared with laughter and the play went on without a hitch, until Larry opened his mouth once again and a pickle crashed into his face. I could only imagine my mom's reaction as I laughed with joy. Through my mess of giggles I glanced at my dad's face, and as his eyes lit up, I knew I was hooked.

My dream did come true. Two summers ago, I stage managed a Paradise show. Just being asked sent me back to that three year old girl in her Powder Puff Girl pjs begging her mom to let her be in a show. That show, Daddy's Dying ,Who is got the Will? , meant, and still means the

world to me. It was the one and only show I did with my mom. Working side by side with your hero is one thing, but when she's your mom, it's even better. That show to this day will always be her best to me, because she had the audience on the edge of their seats with each line. Although her attire was a bit over kill, with the bleached beehive wig and her overkill southern accent, the audience's eyes were still glued to her. Never once did I think I was watching her prepare for her final bow. To me, I was simply studying the greatest actress alive.

That great actress, my mother, got sick six months later. It was two days before Thanksgiving when my little sister woke me up in hysterics at around 3 am. She had heard a bang and went upstairs to find mom unconscious in a pool of her own blood. My mom was a severe anemic and had started hemorrhaging. In a mad rush, we sped to the hospital as she gurgled incoherently. My dad ran her to the doctor, while I tried to calm my siblings. She ended up being discharged a week later with high spirits and everything went back to normal, only my mom's ability to walk lessened. As the weeks went by, it seemed to get worse and she felt worse. We thought it was her anemia, but it wasn't.

Liver failure. Those words still hold my stomach like a brick weight. They were the worse six months of my life, and having just moved out, I felt helpless. Every time I saw her she seemed less and less of the strong woman I adored; she had morphed into what she should have looked like in her 80s. By this point, she could no longer walk and had monthly hospital stays. That's just how we lived. It was our normal; there was progress, she was moving to assisted living and her name would be finally on the list. Then she coded, her heart stopped while my dad sat alone with her in the room. That was the worst phone call of my life. She was put on a form of life support and we had high hopes of recovery, but that's when I ended up on the tile floor overhearing my worst fear coming true. That's when I knew I had to say good bye.

My mother was the best woman in the world, and that day is one I wish would have never happened. Her ability to light up everyone's life by being herself is how I aspire to be. I miss her laugh, her smile, her sarcastic quips, her famous cheese cakes, I miss her. But like her I will be strong, like her I will be brave, and like her I will be kind. And if my dreams do come true, and I am handed an Oscar, I won't thank the Academy, I'll thank her.



## **Forever My Hero**

### **Stephanie Kanjikupa**

The day that I had to watch my father lying in the hospital bed was the most unforgettable day of my life. When I started my early literacy, my father Andre Mbuyi, financial administrator of bank of Zaire was my first tutor. We used to talk every evening about the key to progress in school: reading books, solving mathematical problems, managing my time for nightly homework. When my father passed, I was only twelve years old, and his sudden death put an end to our precious habit. I felt confused; I wondered how I could finish school successfully when the only one who was my role model, motivator, and protector had gone. For me, his loss meant the end of my academic success, and I wondered every day why God allowed this miserable situation to block my way to advancement. Yet I wanted to keep going as I did before, even though he was no longer with me because I had convinced myself that I could practice the discipline that I had learned from him throughout my school journey. My father's rules helped me to be focused and to be strong enough to face any painful situation, which has allowed me to be ambitious.

In sixth grade, my class started at seven and ended by twelve o'clock, six days a week. Early on the first morning of school, I was lying on the bed when I opened my eyes and stared at where I put my uniform. I couldn't see anything. I got up and fumbled my way to the bathroom. Then I glanced down to the basement; I saw my father ironing my classroom suit. Breakfast was already on the table: milk, toast with peanut butter and yogurt. I couldn't eat because the excitement to go to school was so immense I had lost my appetite. "Morning breakfast helps boost concentration and memory," said my father. After school when I got home, I saw a piece of paper stuck on my room's door. I stared at it and read a time designated for nightly homework and bed time. I complained to my dad about how my sleep time was early. A sonorous voice from downstairs said, "I turned off access to games on the computer." I calmly returned to my room and then started murmuring that I lived exactly as soldiers in their training camp. I brought my school supplies downstairs where he had created a small room with a desk and chair in it for me to study in across from our laundry room. I sat and started working quietly and with great concentration; he came to check my homework and put parent signature that everything was excellent.

I continued to follow my dad's discipline in order to achieve school with success. For my father, school was more important than anything else, and he pushed me to prioritize it. When I wanted to participate in my cousin's wedding practice as a bridesmaid. My father asked, "How much homework did your teacher send today?" holding my backpack in his hand. There was absolutely no doubt that he had checked inside. I couldn't have escaped that question, so I replied with a weakened voice while knowing my fate. Without having pity on seeing my deplorable face, he ordered me to set up an alarm by 5:30 am, finish my homework and then sleep. I felt sad. I had no choice but to walk out at my study place and finish my work. I woke up early. I got everything done on time, and my teacher appreciated it. Since that day, I decided to make school my priority. I once asked Dad for help because I didn't understand the explanation given by my teacher was a lot and then I got confused. I didn't get it. He replied, "It's important to look up at your teacher and ask immediately if something does not seem clear." While he was giving me the explanation, I was listening intently. I gazed at his face and tried to be involved. I have adopted that school it was very important, and had prioritized it. Every day he went to work from seven in the morning until five in the evening, but that last night, when he became ill we did not work

together as usual. I thought he was stuck at work because it was the end of the month, so payday. Early morning when I woke up to get ready for school, my mother told me that my dad was very ill, and then I saw my mom help him to get in the car so they could go to the emergency room. It was December 2000 and I had almost finished my sixth grade year of elementary school. The last memory I have of him is at the general hospital of Kinshasa in

Democratic Republic of Congo. His body was so tiny when I arrived. He winked at me and gave me a small smile. As I massaged his hand and feet, I heard a small weak voice that tell me I was doing a good job like a nurse, and though I was tired, I shouldn't stop. I could have asked him what was going on, but I asked myself if we would be working together on my homework. For me, death wasn't the same since my father passed away. Twenty minutes later, I didn't hear any words from his mouth, just a deep breath in and out. I hurried away to find my mom so she could notify the doctor. Returning to his room, I found him breathing so fast. I held his hand firmly and shook it while crying. He tried to say something, but he couldn't. I told him that he was my hero and I loved him, and then it was the end of his life.

Shortly after my dad's death, I tried to overcome this heartbreaking experience that was awful and seemed to take forever. When I got back to school, I forced myself to work hard with determination to move on to middle school. In my country, school is not free. After my dad's demise, we experienced financial difficulties. We spent money paying off hospital bills, organizing a funeral service, and buying food. When I practiced all the skills that I had learned from my dad. I worked hard on every class. My attendance also was excellent, and my principal was impressed to see my grade. At the end of the year, I was awarded the best student of the year, and then I earned one free year of school. I finished my high school with success by practicing the rules received from my dad. My mother wasn't able to pay to send me to university. Thus, I quickly got married and traveled to the United States to pursue an academic program.

The disciplines I learned from my father made me proud after his death; being focused on what I was doing, working hard to accomplish my goal, and being strong enough to face awful situations is what I learned from my father allowed me to become a brilliant student in my class. I realize now that my father had showed me how to be a successful student. As a result, I am back in college despite my great responsibilities as a mother of a big family, I work hard to attain my objective which is to become a radiologist. Also, I'm passing on to my children my dad's discipline. I will always be thankful for all the qualities that I carry with me from him and for his support as a good parent.

## **Mother's Bread**

### **Karla Schwalbe Shumate**

Growing up on a dairy farm with six brothers and one sister, Mother learned hard work at an early age. Though she always wanted to be outside and run around the farm, watching her mother cook in the kitchen was special and fascinating to her. Though I wasn't particularly close with Mother growing up, through her example she passed along the value of not only hard work but the satisfaction that comes with it. Not until having children of my own did I realize the full impact and importance of Mother's homemade bread. Mother's bread was not only food for my body but for my soul.

Each of the five children in my family had their part in the making of the bread. Having done our particular chores so many times, they were now accomplished without thought. My two older sisters were in charge of helping the younger two. One of their chores was to collect eggs from the chicken coop where the squawks from the upset hens filled the farm. The warm brown eggs, gently nestled in a bucket, carried like precious gems to be delivered to Mother in the kitchen. My job was to milk the goats. My strong young hands methodically squeez and gently pull to release the warm white liquid. I watch as it foams and fills the metal pail. The scent of the sweet hay fills my nose as the nanny stands patiently. In the kitchen, Mother helps me skim off the rich cream on top and places it in a mason jar. My siblings and I took turns shaking the jar to turn the cream into the butter we later put on top of Mother's bread.

It was an unspoken tradition that Saturday was bread making day. Mother spent the morning making sure everything was prepared for the task. She took the raw brown wheat from a five-gallon pail in the cellar, carried it to where the grinder was anchored to a homemade workbench and tirelessly cranked the handle until she had just the right amount. The air filled with little puffs of flour dust and settled on the floor as she worked. She then took the fresh goats milk and place it on the stove. Scalding milk was a delicate process she told me. It took patience to get it just right. The eggs, fresh from the coop, were placed into the scalded milk. Once the yeast was warmed and foaming, this too was added to the mixture. Just enough flour was added to make a soft ball. Then the dough was ready to knead. Mother's rough callused hands gently folded more and more flour into the dough as the sticky mass came together. After putting the dough in a large yellow Tupperware bowl, she placed a white terry cloth over it and put it by the sunny window to rise up until the dough could be seen peeking out from under the fabric.

One summer my uncle visited with his three children, whom I soon learned lived completely differently than we did. Out of a gesture of kindness Uncle brought food, to help Mother not have to work so hard while they were visiting. Among the pile of the paraphernalia of bright shiny packages were two loaves of store-bought white bread. My cousin, just eighteen months older than myself, informed me she would not eat homemade bread. Upon the extended families' departure, I informed Mother I would no longer be eating her bread. As each child, in turn, chimed in with their own affirmative vote, it was decided amongst us that store-bought bread would be better, claiming it would be easier on Mother. Though misunderstood at the time, something changed in Mother's eyes that day. Saturday bread was still made, but Mother was unusually quiet.

Not long after that visit, hard times came to the farm causing Mother to make the difficult decision of going back to the hospital where she had worked before I was born. Announcing she

would be getting her first paycheck and going grocery shopping the house was abuzz with excitement, as Father had always done the shopping before. Upon her arrival home, we pulled packages out of the plastic bags like it was Christmas morning. Then, there they were, four entire loaves of store-bought bread. We giggled with excitement and placed the extra loaves in the freezer pushing back the very last loaf of Mother's homemade bread.

The hard work that went into the making of the bread was not lost. It is deep within me. Though I do not have a farm as my parents did, therefore lacking the ability to have many of the fresh ingredients, I am still able to make bread with my own children. While kneading, I remember Mother's hands and while smelling it bake, I am filled with divine energy. I am filled with the love and knowledge that only Mother's example could instill. My soul is still fed with Mother's Bread.

## **Gilmer**

### **Julia Thompson**

Growing up my mother would decide when it was convenient for her to be in the lives of her family. Sometimes it would only be a few weeks other times years would pass by. I was always so confused as a child wondering why mother's presence seemed so sporadic. In the later years of my life, I realized my mother was stuck at 18, the age she had me, living in denial at the end of her teenage years. Over time she passed off three of her children to different family members, increasing my family's uncertainty she would ever settle down and take responsibility for herself or her last child, my youngest brother. But around 2 years ago my mother ran into financial issues and moved to Texas. We spoke with her here and there; after a few months, we noticed she seemed to be an entirely different person. Her talk of bills and my brother was different from all the times she spoke of it before, as if it wasn't her problem. Now she spoke about how she would find a job or her worry over if the school my brother attended was a good choice for him. It's hard to imagine moving to a small town could have such a significant change on a person; but that transition to the town of Gilmer, Texas made a huge impact on me and made me love her new home before I ever saw it.

The first time traveling to my mother's town we drove through a continuous storm, rain flooding the roads and coating the windshield. Once we made it out of the storm the rest of the ride was nothing but the smell of dead skunks. It was such a miserable ride that I thought my entire time down there would be stressing over coming back. When we finally made it to town we pulled through a thicket of woods and found my mother's oasis. Driving past several family run stores restlessness and excitement filled the truck. We made it to my mother's house in a few minutes. We parked a block away because we didn't tell her we were coming and we walked our way up to her home and rang the bell. When she finally answered the door of her boxy looking home, the smile that spread across her face was as luminous as her red hair in the shining sun. I'd never seen her that happy before. She'd moved so far away she hadn't had the option to fade in and out of our lives and I think she realized how much she missed us when we appeared on her door steps.

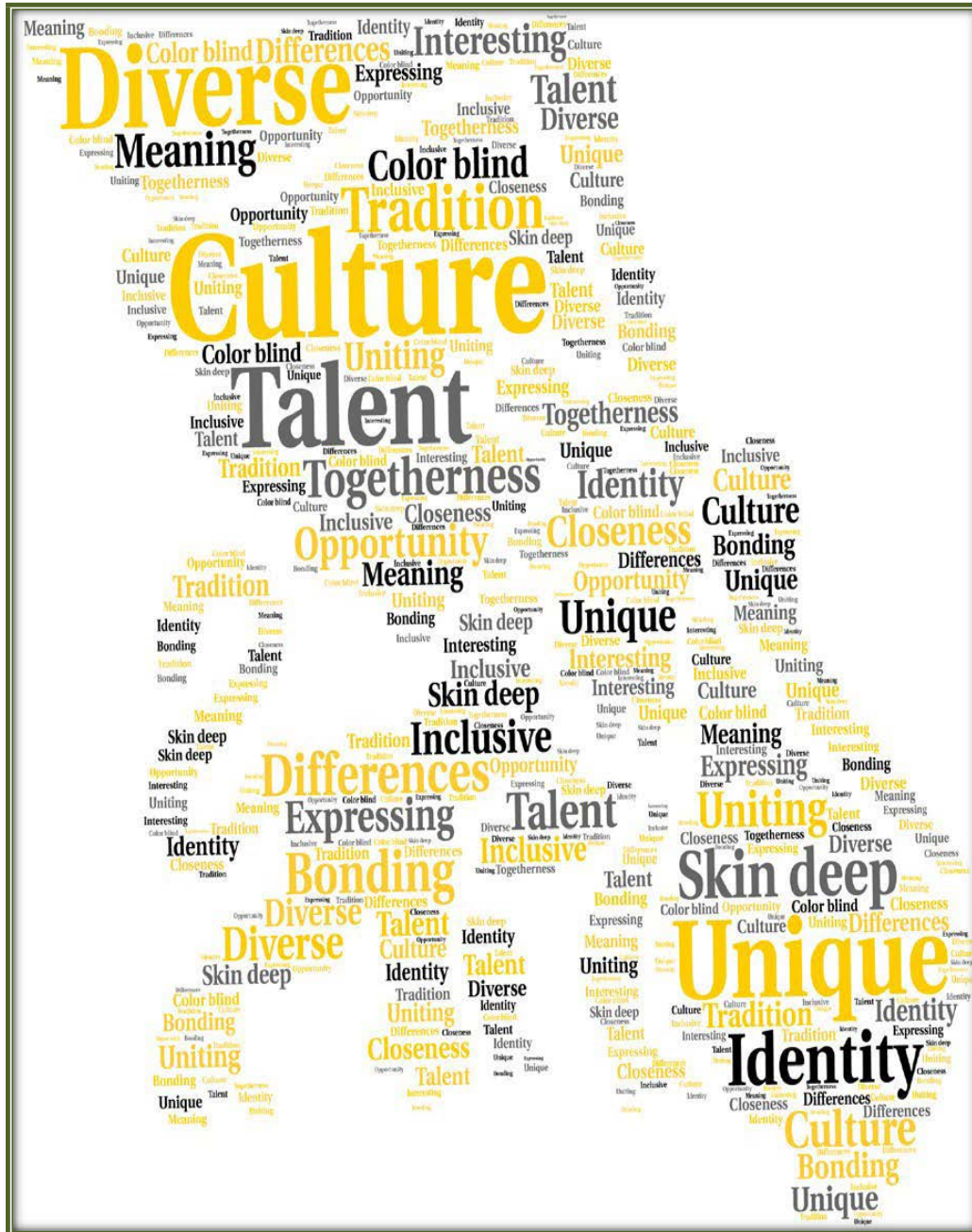
She took us on a tour through the town showing us the shop that sold the softest donuts she said she's ever had and the shopping center of boutique windows full of the cutest clothes. We stopped first at a little ma and pa place. A small restaurant packed with what looked to be every resident in the small town. They were chatting away about their days until she walked in and they all yelled her name and took turns introducing themselves. I could hardly believe how friendly and hospitable these people were. The ladies running the diner, close friends to my mother, gave us a table in the back and plates full of fried green tomatoes and friend pickles. We sat back there discussing whatever we could think of surrounded by the aroma of the frying foods and dust kicked up by the trucks outside. I sat there listening to my mother's version of a giggle, her laugh identical to Woody Woodpecker, as her neighbors would come up asking to hold my daughter, telling her there's no way she was old enough to be a grandmother. She had grown such close relationships with the people down here, it was almost sorrowful to realize she was closer to some of them than to her own family. I kept thinking over how these people became her family in this community and together helped her become who she was now. This town changed her from a woman who would sponge money off those around her to a mother

working to support her son. She seemed happier than I have seen her in a long time and had formed a relationship with not just the people around her but the town she now calls home.

After leaving the restaurant we headed to the nearby park to tire out my daughter, who definitely deserved it after behaving so well being coddled by strangers. For such a compact town, the park was anything but; it had 2 separate sides connected by a huge castle that twisted into swing sets. We went to the right side, which looked to be for smaller children, the ground covered in dark red polysoft and matching woodchips under the swings. We plopped her in one of the swings and my daughter demanded I get in the disabled swing next to her. Obliging to her command I sat and my mother pushed me as my grandmother pushed my daughter. It had been such a long time since I had some a moment of beatific nostalgia with my mother. I laid back and soaked in the warm sun that was already burning my pasty skin. I could have stayed in those moments for hours. Asking my mother to do something that indulgent for me before was a chore of begging and her demanding something in exchange as if every activity was exhausting. This was the first time she so willingly offered up a moment that felt so motherly to me since time out of mind. The moment ended with a squeal as my daughter's attention was drawn to the castle that exhausted me just to look at. She ran up the ramps at break neck speed causing me to trip chasing after her, leading my mother to let out her famous cackling laugh. Grabbing the castle to balance and stand, I found plaques of names all over the pole; glancing around they were everywhere. She told me the park wasn't that old and the plaques were the names of people in the town that donated money to have it built. From young adults with no children to older couples, they all donated the funds to build this safe, joyous castle. It was another moment I was amazed by the generosity of a small community. They cared about and helped one another whether they had something in common or if the goal in mind benefited them all in the end. This willingness and spirit radiating in this town is what has the biggest effect on others, including my mother and myself.

Through the years we had tried so many things to get my mother to come around and reel her in to reality but all to no avail. Her moving away and being secured in a tight knit town and community gave her little option to be who she used to and presented her the opportunity to become the mother and provider my brother deserves but that my other siblings and I lost out on. I will always be sad over what I missed out on as a child but as a mother now myself, I can forgive it knowing the pattern will not continue. It's a relief knowing my brother will receive what I wished for growing up and experience the same support I give my daughter. It was only one weekend in that town that changed everything I felt about my mother. From the benevolence of the people and influence they supply, I got to see how my mother was affected and changed by these people and Gilmer. I left knowing the effect that town has on me.

# *The Power of Words*



## **Escaping to a World Where Words are not Spoken**

**Leona Horton**

Have you ever wished you could read something that you can relate to or understand? That can allow you to have a voice and be heard? Have you ever written something or read something that you enjoyed and had a sense of happiness afterwards? Once I started writing in college, I began to feel that passion I felt growing up, and how very important writing and reading are to me, because it allows me to express myself, and learn a lot more things about myself and the world in which we exist. In the essay “The Love of Books” by Gloria Naylor, Naylor talks about how she was introduced into the world of books by her mother, how and why she was inspired to start reading and writing, as well as how writing changed her life.

My parents grew up in the South during the time when it was hard for African Americans to get an education or have enough money to buy books. My mother didn't go to school because she had to work in the fields picking cotton at the age of eight, she wasn't allowed to go to school and receive an education, nor read or write, unlike today when it is required for a child to receive reading and writing as a part of basic education. Unlike Naylor I was only taught about reading and writing in school, but I never felt the passion for it because I wasn't taught about the value of reading books, or had an interest. Feeling different from others I also became a very repressed adolescent. I was lost in a world where words were not spoken and feelings were locked away looking for a place to escape. So unlike Naylor I didn't grow up around books or libraries; not learning early on affected me to the point where I had not learned to dream about my future. It wasn't until after going through a lot of depression I found myself writing down my thoughts and feelings, realizing the relief and fulfillment I felt after writing how it influenced me to continue writing. Wanting more now that I'm older I return to school to receive my GED, now entering the college life where writing and reading is required it's a new world of learning. At first it was very hard because I didn't learn what I needed in school, so I had to learn all over again. Once I started writing in college I began to feel that passion I felt growing up, and how very important writing and reading are to me, it allows me to express myself and to learn more things.

In the beginning Naylor talks about her parents, like my parents, growing up in the South, where African Americans weren't allowed to go to the library nor were they able to buy books. Wanting more for their children, Naylor's parents moved the family up North where their children will have more freedom to learn. Different from the South they provided libraries for the lower-class people to be able to read and check out books. Naylor's mother who also had a passion for books began taking her children to the library early on, so she could begin teaching them the value of reading. Naylor remembers her mother telling her and her sister “She is not ashamed of her back-ground-it was not a sin to be poor. But the greatest sin is to keep people from learning to dream.” (227). Believing that books can allow you to go places you've never thought of, Naylor spent a lot of growing up around books being at the library with her mother.

Even though I went to school to gain an education, reading and writing were not my favorite subjects, so instead of learning I would skip through my homework, and my grades proved it; after my grades failed many times, I began to lose interest in learning altogether, so I



was disrupting the class to the point the teachers also gave up on me and my learning. My mom really didn't put too much into me going to school so eventually I quit going at the age of thirteen. My mother and father were divorced and fighting a lot so they didn't pay too much attention about my school attendance or me quitting school altogether. I grew up seeing my classmate receiving awards for spelling bee contests or making honor roll and their parents where there to cheer them. I never understood why my mother never took me to the library or helped me with my work, or came to any school function so I figure school was a waste of time. It wasn't until later I found out the reason behind my non-education was simply because she didn't know how to read nor write herself, so she wasn't able to teach me.

I was unlike Naylor, who talks about how she grew up going to the library before she had even attained the age of literacy her mother was taking them on what Naylor call "pilgrimages to the library", listening to her mother say, "Do you see all these books! Once you can write your name, all of these books will be yours. For two weeks. But yours." (227). Naylor once old enough began reading and started with books written by Louisa May Alcott, like *Little Women*, and *Little Men*, and *Jo's Boys* and *Under the Umbrella* until she reaches the set written by Laura Ingalls Wilder -- *Little House on The Prairie* (228) as Naylor states "It was a world through which I live. Naylor states in her essay "While indeed it was to educate us, I think it was also to heal some place within herself. (227). Naylor goes on and talks about "How books were to be my only avenue out of the walls my emotions built around me in those years. Going through a lot of mix emotions Naylor was able to transform reading books into something that brought peace to her giving her a sense of happiness for herself.

Just as Naylor, I grew up feeling isolated from others, I felt I didn't fit in with the kids at school because of my lack of education. I didn't fit in at home because I was the youngest out of eighteen siblings and everyone was close to each other except for me. I didn't know anything about public libraries, nor did we have books around the house to read but, I remember going to the health clinic where they had magazines called *Highlights* which was designed for children to read short stories and educational games. I started reading more and more every time we had an appointment until one day I took the order sheet and order my first set of books for free. I wasn't picky on what I received I was just excited to be receiving my very own set of books that I owned. I read books like *The Color Purple* and *Beloved*, it was so interested to find out what happened next, I read day and night finishing the books in a three weeks span, when others were playing I was alone reading finding myself in my own world. Feeling a sense of my own freedom from the world without any words spoken. Just like Naylor, I began writing into a single spiral notebook my thoughts and feeling I was facing at home. Growing up in a home where chaos was happening every day. From watching my parents fighting almost every day, my brother and sister's running in and out of the house with their friends, I didn't know what peace meant in a home like ours. I was the youngest of eighteen and my parents both worked so I was left alone with my brothers a lot at a very young age and I began to experience sexual abuse and my mother didn't believe anything I told her, so I kept a lot balled inside and there was nobody else I could tell this horrific story to. Just like Naylor, I was a teenager who began thinking about suicide, and fell into a deep depression. I didn't have anyone I could trust with that horrifying situation I was in, I was only nine years old and who would believe me if my mother didn't, so I

kept quiet, and it continued to go on until I was in my early teenage years. Not having anyone to trust with this I began writing down each event that happen to me and saved each letter to myself in a notebook I hid away until I realize years has pass and I had over ten notebooks with details on my abuse. I soon lost interest in writing because it started to remind me of my pain, hurt, and confusion in this world. After talking to someone they advised me to start writing down good things, and places I would love to go and see, write about who I see myself as beside a victim, then I'll be able to find enjoyment and passion writing once made me feel. Being able to write down my life's trials I found myself writing my stories into poetry which I develop a passion for still to this day.

Naylor's mother knew that Naylor was not a talker but knew she had a lot inside her mind that needed to get out, so one day she went out and bought her a diary nothing fancy but something to write down her enter thoughts. Believing she had a lot inside that needed to come out but couldn't but though writing she would be able to express all that she feels. Naylor states after her mother leaves the room "I picked up the diary and I did just that, I proceeded to write down all the things that I could not say." (p228). Thoughts of a teenage can go unnoticed which can lead to a lot of suicides, due the pain that be trapped inside a young person's mind as Naylor went through before writing down her feeling inside this diary. Naylor also states, "Through the luck of the draw of having a very wise and perceptive mother who happened to match what I needed with the gift of that diary, my life was saved." (228). Naylor realized being able to write down the things she wasn't able to say out loud still gave her a voice. Knowing that the feeling she was feeling will soon turn into a voice that could be heard by everyone.

In Naylor's essay "The Love of Books" she explains how she was able to incorporate reading and writing into a positive way of dealing with different situations she faced as a young teenager. Being able to express what she was feeling on paper she found herself writing books that touch many from different parts of the world. Being from going to the library with her mom, to writing in her diary she was able to transfer the shyness, and pain and develop something to share with the world who may be going through comparable situation. Just like Naylor, I found writing as a way of dealing with situation I faced as a teenage dealing growing up in a dysfunctional home. Thinking about suicide feeling it was my only freedom to peace in my life, until I began writing journals of my life, and the life I deserved. Sometimes I wonder to this day if I never started writing down what was going on in my life would I have survived, what would have happened to me a teenager who could speak but hid a lot of pain and scars.

A lot of teenagers are going through similar situations today and don't really know what to do or which way to go, when facing abuse, problems in school, home, or either their own inner demons that a lot of adults brush off as a child with no discipline until it's too late, as then they have token their lives. Teaching them how to write down things that are hard to say or express can be a way of healing instead of continuing holding in painful emotions. Some are too shy, ashamed, or just feeling alone, and don't feel they are able to express what they are feeling inside, and sad to say some end up taking their life to escape the pain. Being able to explain to your children about how reading and writing is more than just educational, and teach them about expressing themselves even if it's on paper can help relieve painful emotions

that can allow you to have a voice or develop a voice. Teaching my own children about writing down their feelings not only gave them their voice but gave them the power to be free from a world where words are not spoken.

## How Writing Saved My Life

Rebecca Miller

Like many adolescents, I faced inner turmoil. It was a time of changing hormones, cruel peers, and self-doubt for me. As with Gloria Naylor in her essay “The Love of Books,” my demons were very real as I was caught between childhood and adulthood. There are some teenagers who turn to drugs and alcohol, youthful promiscuity, or crime, all because they feel lost and confused. There are other youths who turn to art, which is healthier than other potential outlets. An art form used by both Naylor and me was writing, and it kept us both from turning the pain inward. Writing for me was an outlet for the confusion and pain, an escape from the negativity and mundane of everyday life, and a passionate driving force toward something more in my life.

Struggling with depression and anxiety was my reality through high school, and writing helped me cope with that confusion and pain, with the help of friends. My friends and I dealt with cruelty from peers by writing insulting, joking poetry instead of confronting those classmates. I realized quickly how therapeutic it was to write those jokes instead of sinking to the level of those who publicly demeaned us. I chose to keep writing, changing my topic away from the bullies, but instead to feelings of my own battles with self-esteem and the world around me. I was an artist in need of release, and like Naylor, I wrote. To explain, Naylor remarks, “I paraphrase Toni Morrison in *Sula*: An artist without an art form is a dangerous thing. It is probably one of the most dangerous things on this earth” (228). I had my art, and I ran with it. Many of my new writings were kept private, but to gain insight and to not feel alone, I did share some which helped more than I understood.

I shared some of this poetry with the same friends who’d written jests together, but even when I wasn’t sharing these feelings with the world, it felt like a pressure eased when I got them down on paper. I spoke of feeling trapped like a fly in a spider’s web, of being jailed by those who belittled and ostracized me, and of not wanting to wake to avoid the negativity I felt surrounded me. Sharing these creative writings with my friends opened a whole new world for us. Since they started doing the same, it became an unofficial writing therapy group without us having realized it. I wasn’t alone in my hormone-driven anguish anymore. I didn’t realize until many years later how much that writing, and sharing helped me. The ability to express my feelings, and to feel validated did, in fact, save my life. Like Naylor, I would have turned those feelings inward. To illustrate, Naylor shares, “And being a female in the 1960s, I would have, I think, directed that destruction inward as opposed to outward” (228-229). Without a way to release the pain, who knows what would happen with it. It could turn into self-harm, or like with others who fail to release it constructively, with violence. Thankfully, I turned to words instead. Not only did I need that outlet for the feelings, but when the stress of everyday life was too much for me, I again turned to writing, this time as an escape.

When the world I lived in was unbearable, I ran to another, one of fiction with characters of my own design. While reading Naylor’s essay, I saw that I was not alone in the escapism of fiction writing. For instance, Naylor wrote, “...I have always been enamored somehow with the mystical and the idea of alternative realities, and began writing supernatural stories even as an

adolescent” (229). Like Naylor, I found that my writing had evolved, while unlike her it had taken a decade-long break for me to find that it had. I lived in that fictitious world, felt more like the brave, adventurous, beautiful, and loved characters than myself. I sometimes wonder now if it had been an escape or an attempt at replacing what I saw as a mundane prison.

With my responsibilities weighing heavily on me, my romantic long-term relationship feeling like a dull chore, and feeling like a failure who was trapped, I fled. The fantasy world I escaped into came in the form of role-playing online, and I was only known as my main character. She was everything I didn’t see in myself. She had amazingly adventurous and intriguing attachments to other characters. I felt included in this wondrous land, and I was praised for my storytelling abilities. I felt alive in a way I hadn’t in months, accepted in a way I hadn’t in years. I found myself spending time in this universe more and more, to the point of obsession. It did negatively affect the relationships I had with my boyfriend, daughter, and quite a few friends. It even affected my job performance. While in many ways, this was a negative in my life, it still brought a lot of positivity. Not only did this create an alternative to feeling negative, but it also renewed the creative spark and made me realize how much I loved and needed writing.

The fiery passion for the written word had been ignited within me once again, making me understand that, to feel successful and happy with my life, I didn’t need to ignore the life I lived, but to intertwine that life with words. The best way I could think to do this was to find a career that focused on the written word somehow, whether it is to put my creative spin on stories in the news, to edit the writings of my peers, to write fiction for others to read, or one of many other professional endeavors surrounding words. I know in my soul that I need to create something. Creativity is a vital part of my life, like a life-sustaining drug. I only feel truly alive when I am writing actively. Furthermore, Naylor and I both found similar revelations in our mid-to-late twenties. In the case of Naylor, she describes, “But it took until I was twenty-seven years old for me believe that I had the faintest chance of being a writer” (229). For me, it was when I was twenty-nine years old that I got my opportunity to be published for the first time. A friend of mine had sent me a link to a site of a submission request for an anthology. The topic for the submissions was to be fiction illustrating women’s struggles through history. I immediately wanted to write a piece for it and submitted my story later that day. Within hours, I was accepted. I felt overwhelmed with emotions for being accepted and ran to everyone who would listen, and some who I’m sure wouldn’t have, and told them of my fantastic news! The editor eased my fears and helped me realize my potential for editing professionally when she related that I had drastically fewer editing marks than some of those with several publications under their belts. I was in awe, to put it simply. My love of words was going to be shared with so many others, and with not just one but two short stories in this anthology. I again felt completely alive thanks to my craft, my art form: writing.

Books and writing alike have always been important in my life. Writing is in my blood; it flows through my veins. Words have done so much more positive in my life than negative. Written expression has saved my life by allowing a therapeutic release, given me a haven when I felt the world had me trapped, and gave me passion when I believed it had all but died. For some,

writing is simply a hobby. For me, it gives me joy and excitement. One of my favorite quotes is one from Ernest Hemingway. It speaks of the writer bleeding at his or her typewriter. As a writer, and proudly a published author, I know to be successful I will need to make sure that there is plenty of myself in my work. I need to bleed for the reader, to put my soul on the pages. The desire and drive are true, present, and very real for me. I have enjoyed the journey thus far, and look forward to seeing where this fantastic art form shall lead from here on out.

Naylor, Gloria. "The Love of Books." Introduction to College Writing. 4th ed. Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2010. 225-231. Print.

## **Literacy**

### **Autobiography**

#### **Taylor Ramsey**

In all my writing experience, I have gathered that a good writer is not just perfect at the fundamentals of writing essays and papers such as organization and quality. Instead I believe that a good writer can relate his essay to himself and/or the reader while still having an organized essay and having a clear thesis. As a young writer I struggled with organizing my thoughts on to paper. I was always encouraged to keep a journal but I was never committed enough to write in them every day. I had several different journals around my room for different occasions all hidden in different places. My favorite one to this day is my travel journal that I've had since I was ten. I also had a variety of journal essays I kept in a shoebox under my bed. In high school I had a google drive where I kept journal that I updated every week or so just to pour all my stress into. Writing assignments at school were always a different story though. I struggled with reports and research essays. I couldn't ever find the right content or the correct formats teachers expected from me. My college writing class has helped me find a happy medium. I can now balance my personal life as well as include the material that is expected of me.

I received my first journal from my Grandmother as a gift before she asked me to accompany her on a trip to Honduras. The trip was about two weeks long and for a ten-year-old that was a very long time to be away from home. I had plenty to write about in my journal, I saw my first waterfall and my first volcano all while I was there and I did not miss a single detail when writing in my journal about it. I wrote how the waterfall was so massive and made me feel so small. The sound was so soothing almost like a soft thunder storm in the distance. All I could smell was the crisp moist air with a mixture of pine. I wrote about the Volcano and how green it was and how the clouds fell below its peak. Writing for enjoyment came so naturally to me I never had to worry if I should create a new paragraph or if I need to check any grammar mistakes or even cite my sources. My journal was free of judgment there were no critics, only endless pages ready to be filled with my very own thoughts and ideas.

My high school English teachers mostly focused on reports and essays all the things I struggled with. My Junior year I took a poetry class to see if I could boost my English grade. Poetry was so fun and I seemed to be one of the better ones in my class. I could write the poems about my personal life as long as it fit the type of poem format requested. I mostly turned to my journals to be inspired. Senior year I took a College English class even though I had not tested high enough to receive any credit. Not having a high test score really discouraged me as a writer. I felt blank when writing essays over topics I couldn't relate to. During those times I felt very similar to Russell Baker in his essay "Learning to Write." When Russell was assigned an essay his response was, "My mind went numb. Of all forms of writing, none seemed as boring as the essay" (Baker268). By that time in my life essays had drained the life out of me. Nothing was more tortuous than an essay due at the end of a class period.

As I entered the new and exciting world of college I was nervous about my writing skills. My teacher the year prior made it clear to me I was more than likely going to struggle. She couldn't have been more wrong. Our first assigned topic was about someone who had a significant impact on us. I had never been more relieved. The words seemed to flow right onto

the paper. I felt just like Baker when he received a topic he enjoyed. Baker wrote, “Suddenly I wanted to write about that, about the warmth and good feeling of it, but I wanted to put it down simply for my own joy” (Baker 268) I wrote the paper so quickly and was so proud. I soon learned that writing from the heart did not automatically make me a great writer. When I got my paper back I had several grammatical and organizational errors that needed revised. Throughout the class I learned from my professor and writing workshops how to properly structure a paper to where it flows and has meaning. By my third paper I had successfully integrated both textual evidence and personal responses into my paper. All while having an organized and well thought out paper. I do recognize that I still have much to learn and many things I can continue to improve on, but I know for sure that without this college writing class I would still be in the writing slum I was stuck in my last few years of high school.

Throughout my education I have loved to write for myself. I now know because of my college experience that I can incorporate my ideas and thoughts into my text based papers. I also find that I do much better on papers where I enjoy the topic I am writing about. Now I know how to organize a paper to reflect my thesis and use paragraphs to separate my different thoughts which also improves my papers. Thanks to my College Writing class, I now have what it takes to be a good writer for the rest of my college career.

Baker, Russell. “How I Learned to Read and Write”. Introduction to College Writing. Sixth Edition. Boston: The McGraw-Hill Companies. INC 2008



## **My Love of Reading**

### **Julia Thompson**

You will always run into time when you need help, when there are more questions than answers. Times when you just need to be alone and you need something to ease your mind and uplift you to where you wish you were. For me that has always been reading. I have had lots of troubled times in my past and even now. Moments when I want to be left alone or am so upset I can't think straight I'll grab one of the several books I'm reading at any given moment. Within seconds of my eyes hitting the page the stories have absorbed me. They take me into a world where my problems are small, because my wonder surpasses them. When reading the essays, "One Writer's Beginnings" by Eudora Welty and "Read with Purpose" by Cheryl Barnett-Bey there were so many moments in them I connected with and felt rang with the same emotions I feel on reading and writing. Welty grew up with a deep love for reading and a family who felt the same. Barnett-Bey realized later in life just how important reading and writing is. Reading and writing are two of the most important things you will need in life. You will always need to read and constantly develop your reading skills no matter whether you enjoy it or not. Or you could read to simply escape into story. The amount of benefits and uses of reading and writing outweigh all the reasons not to. For me reading and writing, mostly the stories they give me, have been one of the most important things in my life and will always be.

My love for reading started at an early age just like Welty, "I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to." (Welty 298). She describes her house as having a bookcase in the living room, which her family called 'the library', and having shelves and stands throughout her house filled with more books. They were placed ready to read and be discussed at any time. While in my own home all our books were kept on the large book case in our hallway. It overflowed with religious books, Dr. Seuss, Harry Potter, and tales covering the Black Dahlia case along with tons of other novels whose names I can't recall. Just as Welty my grandmother didn't have very much money to buy something whenever she wanted, and the books had been acquired over a long time. The bookshelf itself was large, dusty, and very used but the books that called it home were perfect and organized. Spines shined like they were brand-new, but every book opened with ease, pages turned smooth and ready to share their stories time and again.

In the beginning of Welty's essay, she spoke of her mother reading to her and said, "She'd read to me in the dining room on winter afternoons in front of the coal fire... Sometimes she read to me in the kitchen while she sat churning." (Welty 298). She wrote how her mother was such an expressive reader that when she read *Puss in Boots* you could tell her distrust of cats. This introduction brought forth the memories of my grandmother sitting in her recliner, reading her soap opera digest until I'd bug her into reading to me. She'd pick out a Dr. Seuss book and would hand it to me as she started supper. She stopped needing the book to read having memorized the words in almost all the Dr. Seuss books long ago. I would follow along the words and examine the pictures as she told me the story. The fact that she was able to know these words before me without even looking, when I couldn't even read them while staring them down always drove me crazy and amazed me. I'd follow her room to room holding the book while she sang the words. I was determined to learn it myself. My stubbornness succeeded, and I

was able to read Dr. Seuss, but it turned out to not be enough. I wanted more, and I was able to read well enough over time, but the real determination came when she started reading us *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling. From the very first chapter title "The Boy Who Lived" I was hooked. I was very young, I can't even remember how old, but I remember waiting in the living room excited. I was listening for my grandmother's brakes as they squeaked around the corner up the block, the sound was proof she was almost home. It drove her nuts honestly, every day she walked in and I rushed her with demands, but I always won. My brother and I would find seats on the floor in the kitchen in front of the stove for some warmth and my grandma would read a chapter or two while making hot cocoa. Those moments were where I found the real connection between myself and Welty. Just children excited and begging to learn of new words and worlds.

When growing up you enjoy all the small moments, but it takes years to realize the importance in them. Had my grandmother not been so adamant about reading to us, just as Welty's parents were with her, I may not have had such a deep love for it throughout my life. My grandmother sitting down and reading me *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J.K. Rowling was the start to my passion for reading. She read slowly through it for my brother and it drove me nuts. I started sneaking it away and reading alone in the night or while she was at work until I finished it before she even knew I had been keeping it. That was the start to me wanting a new book during every trip to the store and heavy bags of stories from the library a few blocks from our home. When I use to think back on those memories I always laughed about how obsessive I became so quickly. Now I look back and realize I had been given true wonder and freedom. Just as Welty had said "I located myself in these pages and could go straight to the stories and pictures I loved" (Welty 301) so had I. When I discovered reading I found out a lot about myself, personal stuff about what kind of person I am and want to become. I knew my books and the stories I carried better than the people around me. I grew up with my grandparents instead of my mother who had practically abandoned me, and I bared no ill will towards her for this because stories had replaced the resentment I felt towards her. Thanks to reading I realized a long time ago there was no reason to hold onto the horrid feelings she gave me. For the longest time I couldn't even remember her middle name or birthday but that's ok because I could recite the 'Howler' from "*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* by J.K. Rowling and that was far more important for me. It brought me pride and excitement to be able to know the story so well.

Writing came to me more at a later age in life just as it had come to Barnett-Bey. Barnett-Bey grew up without much interest into reading and writing, her parents worked hard to provide for her and describes them saying, "My parents were too busy working to dream." (Barnett-Bey 334). It was in college that Barnett-Bey and I both finally brought forth the real spark of wanting to write. For me, it was not because I was uninterested before but because I hadn't found a reason to venture past the barriers I had created against writing. When I was younger I would misbehave, as all children do, and my punishment was that I was made to write sentences. I don't recall everything I did to receive my writing, but I remember perfectly well scribbling sentences such as 'I will never smoke another cigarette', 'I will learn to listen and behave without being told', and 'I will not act foolishly in public' along with plenty of other things over a thousand times. My groundings were never really groundings, I was just not allowed to do anything but

write until I finished my sentences even if it took me months. No games, no T.V., and no reading until they were done. Having my books taken from me was half the pain behind having to write. I still remember staring at the yellow notepad filled with tears and smeared, sloppy words and the massive cramping in my fingers. Unlike Barnett-Bey I didn't even keep a journal to write my thoughts or feelings, I just loathed writing and avoided at all costs for years to come. Until I entered college and learned, just as Barnett-Bey had, the importance behind writing down your own thoughts and feelings, how good it can make you feel. My journey into writing is just at its start and already I have learned many lessons. I have always used reading as a way to collect my thoughts and emotions and it never failed to help me, but writing has brought forth a new form of that same comfort. Barnett-Bey says, "Great literature can be a means of escape, but is we can connect to the story, reading can also free us to write from our own experiences" (Barnett-Bey 334) and that is exactly how I feel now. Thanks to the amazing books, journals, and essays I have read through this class and my life I now can write with something other than disdain. I can find relaxation in it and when writing I discover different things about myself that I didn't even know.

In the essays, "Read with Purpose" by Cheryl Barnett-Bey and "One Writer's Beginning" by Eudora Welty you learn of two different woman that learned love for reading and/or writing at completely different times in their lives. While Welty discovered her love at a young age Barnett-Bey discovered much later in life and I learned at both. My love for reading developed as a child and taught me to cope with my pains. Reading taught me how to forgive and love, it developed me into the person I am now. While I didn't learn to love and appreciate writing until now, in college. Thanks to writing I have new ways to understand what I read and new ways to express my own self, writing can help release the feelings to personal to speak. No matter what I am doing, reading and writing come into play. I could just be sitting in class, teaching my daughter her ABC's, reading a new book, or playing a video game and the reading and writing are there, grasping at me. I have learned my love for reading and writing over my entire life and will continue to do so and I will always be learning new ways they will help me develop through time.

Barnett-Bey, Cheryl. "Read with Purpose" Introduction to College Writing, McGraw Hill 2010, pp 333-336

Welty, Eudora. "One Writer's Beginnings" Introduction to College Writing, McGraw Hill 2010, pp 298-303