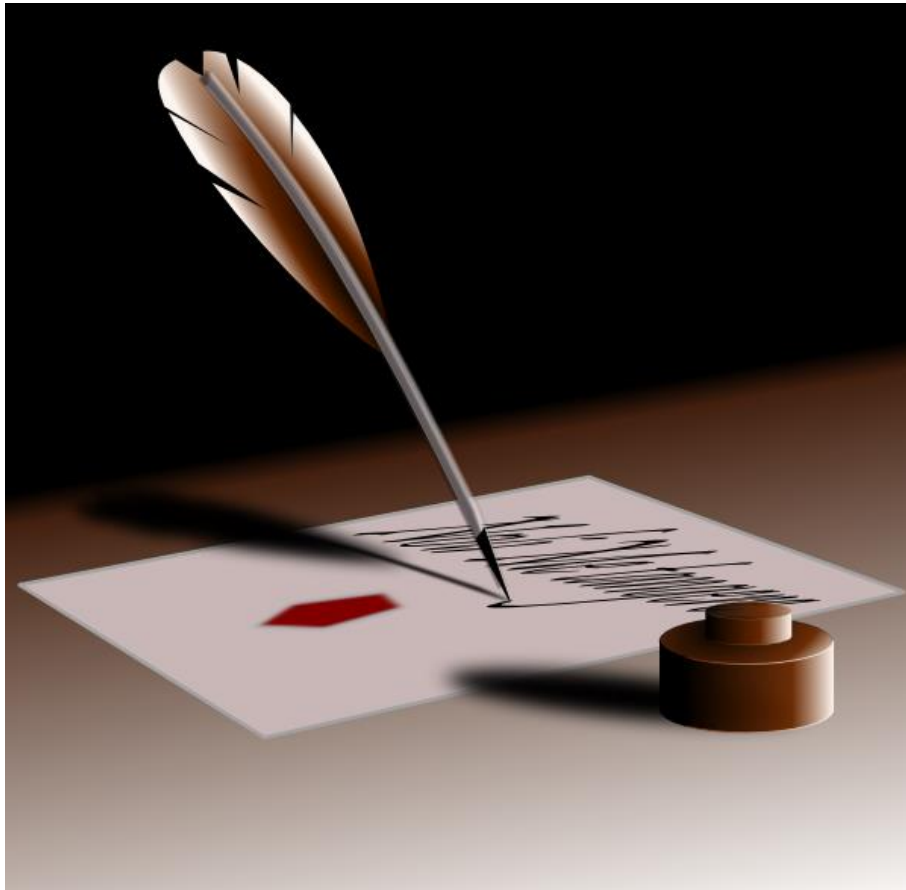


Spring 2014

Discovering the Student, Discovering the Self: Essays from ENG 100 Students



Department of English and Modern Languages
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Introduction

Dawn Terrick



The essays that appear in this publication were selected by the English 100 Committee from submissions from English 100 students from the Fall 2013 semester. The criteria used to evaluate and select these essays included content, originality, a sense of discovery and insight on the part of the student writer, control of form, language and sentence construction and representation of the various types of assignments students are engaged in while in this course. ENG 100, Introduction to College Writing, is a developmental composition course designed for students who show signs of needing additional work on their college-level writing before starting the regular general education composition classes. In this course, students learn about and refine their writing process with a strong focus on the act of revision, engage in critical reading, thinking and writing and write both personal and text-based essays. ENG 100 prepares students for the rigors of college-level writing and introduces them to college expectations. It is our hope that these student essays reflect the struggle and the joy, the hard work and the rewards that these students have experienced both in their lives and in the classroom. Furthermore, these essays reflect the diversity of our English 100 students and the uniqueness of this course. Our students are entering college straight out of high school and are returning to the classroom after years of work and family, come from urban and rural areas, and represent different races and cultures. And

this work is truly their work -- the committee has not made any revisions or corrections to the essays. And as you read, we hope that you will discover the same things that the students have discovered: during their first semester in college they are discovering themselves, realizing that they are part of many communities and defining themselves as individuals, students, scholars and citizens.

Missouri Western State University

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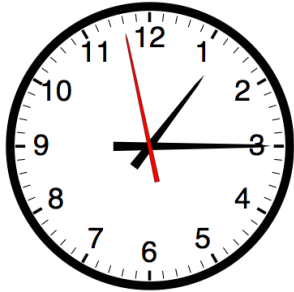
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How It All Started

Edna Frimpong



I remember being called on by most of my middle school English teachers to read to the whole class each time we had English lesson. I was called to read all the time because I knew how to pronounce most of the words better than my peers could. It was something I had to learn gradually while I was growing up. I wasn't lucky like Eudora Welty who indicates in her essay "One Writers Beginning" how she was read to by her parents. I grew up in the part of the world with parents who can be compared with Richard Rodriguez's parents who he indicates in his essay "The Lonely, Good Company of Books", who read only when necessary. Reading wasn't something they did for fun, but did with things they thought was important.

Unlike Welty whose parents taught her how to read, I was left on my own to struggle through the early stages of literacy. I never saw books lying around the house for me or any of my siblings to read while growing up. We only had this opportunity whenever we went to school. They thought it was solely the school's responsibility to educate us. Welty says "I learned at the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of the day, was there to read in or to be read to" (298). I remember at the

age of two or three, I was left to play the whole time until I got tired and fell asleep so my mother could continue with her chores. The only book I saw in the house was the Bible and some books my dad brought home from work. You dared not touch any of them. The Bible was portrayed to me as a sacred book nobody should play with. The only time I saw my parents open the Bible was on Sundays during church service.

I grew up in a developing country, where people at the time did not really know the importance of education. Even if they knew, it was something only the rich could afford. My father was lucky to have become an accountant, but he never showed any interest in reading, or reading to any of his kids. Rodriguez says "For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible" (293). Just like Rodriguez's mother, who read onion-paper letters air-mailed from Mexico with news of a relative's illness or death, the only thing I saw my mother read was my report card from school. Which I think was something she thought was important.

The other thing Rodriguez and I have in common was when I came in contact with my sixth grade English teacher, Mr. Nyarko, who really paid attention to me and never gave up on my poor reading skills at the time. Rodriguez had to wait for the nun every time after school for his reading lessons, I also had to do the same. Rodriguez says, "Playfully she will run through complex sentences, calling the words alive with her voice, making it seem that the author was speaking directly to me" (294). This teacher made me wait for an hour every time after school so he could help and teach me how to read. My parents were informed about this and asked to pay

for extra tuition but they refused. The teacher still did not give up and went ahead to assist me without getting paid. Similar to the way he got excited with how the nun pronounced while making difficult sentences and words look and sound simple, my teacher also made some of the words sound and look simple to me. I also enjoyed being read to by this teacher, just because of the free flow of words in his reading.

We continued with our meeting for about a period of six months until the teacher was satisfied with the way I read. He gave me books to take home, read and bring back the next day. I was supposed to look out for difficult words, write them down, and find the meanings to those words. In sixth grade, looking at a developing country like Ghana, I could spell words like, enthusiasm, reluctant and so many others and also knew what they meant.

The new change my teacher exposed me to made me develop love for books and also an interest in writing. I started visiting the school library, and borrowing books like, Puss in Boots, Alice in Wonderland, Peter Pan, The Animal Farm, and My Book of Bible stories from my friends to take home to read during my leisure times. At home anytime I picked a book to read, just like Rodriguez says in his essay, his mother asked him, “What do you see in your books?” (295). I also heard my mother from the other side of the living room shout my name and ask me this same question Rodriguez’s mother asked him. Sometimes my mother said to me “You are such a lazy girl who doesn’t want to do any house chores by hiding behind those books and pretending as if to be reading”. Little did my mother know that in these books was I living the dream of any girl my age

living in a developed country. These books made me imagine how this other part of the world looks and feels like.

Growing up, in high school, the kind of books I read also changed. I began reading books like, Gulliver’s Travel, Oliver Twist and a series of books from the Babysitters Club. This put me ahead of the class just like Rodriguez says in his essay, “In these various ways, books brought me academic success as I hoped that they would” (296). I also excelled in most of the reading and writing exam I had to take in order to move up in the educational ladder. Reading has made it easy for me to interact with people and further my education when I came to the United States. I wouldn’t have been able to do all this if it weren’t for learning how to read and write because English is my second language.

Discovering inner passion is something that starts at an early age. If parents would take time off their busy schedules just to spend some time with their kids to do something that will bring out the best in them, no child will be called dumb when they start going to school. Since somebody devoted his time for me to become the better writer and reader I am today, I have also made a promise to my unborn children to give them the best education in life, which means by starting with them in the early stages of their lives.

The Lost Boys

Dorinda Chambers



Everybody has that certain person that they look up to, whether it is a celebrity, sports star, or an actor. The consequences that we all face from our past may determine what our future may hold. In the book *The Other Wes Moore* written by Wes Moore, the second Wes Moore is responsible for his own choices because he is going down the same path as his older brother Tony. The environment where children are raised can affect what the future will hold. I will be comparing Wes #2 to my uncle Timothy Chambers, because both were given the opportunity to turn their lives around but chose to continue going down the wrong path, which led Timothy to his death. When such tragedies happen their destiny is how their past affected their future by their actions.

Wes grew up in a dangerous surrounding of drugs, theft, and violence. He looked up to his older brother Tony, a “certified gangsta” (Moore 27), who has been running the streets before he was ten years old. Even though he was in the game of being in the drug business, Tony was also Wes #2’s protector. He did not want Wes to follow in his footsteps and make something of him. Mary, Wes #2’s mom, also wanted a better life for her younger son. She noticed

how Wes looked at his older brother and wanted the nice clothes and jewelry, Mary came back at him hard by saying “and you see Tony just ended up in the hospital, right? Be thankful for what you got!” (Moore 57). Wes did not care; he wanted to be like Tony, who was his role model.

Growing up, children who have grown up in an environment of violence, drugs, and theft will follow in the footsteps of failing. When Wes became old enough to make his own decisions, he decided he was not going to go to school. Tony called to check in on his mom and brother, Wes picked up the phone and Tony was shocked. He should have known that Wes should have been in school that day, “Yo, you need to take this shit seriously, man. Acting stupid ain’t cool!” (Moore 27). As much as Tony tried to persuade his little brother to straighten up, Wes would not listen; he would do the exact opposite from what his older brother would try to tell him to do. Wes still wanted to be part of the streets like his brother, without knowing the consequences he would be facing in the end. Not only a few blocks away from where Wes lived, had he noticed a kid not much older than he was with a pair of headsets from the Janet Jackson “Control” video. Wes was really interested to see where he could get a headset. Moore walked up to the kid and said, “Hey, where can I get one of those headsets?” (Moore 58). The young man with the headset replied, “You want one of these, it’s pretty easy. All you have to do is wear one, and every time you see jakes roll by, and I’ll give you your money” (Moore 58). Being convinced on how he could get easy money, Wes was now a lookout for the drug dealers and his job was to let the dealers know if he saw the police coming and that is how so he got his money. Wes found the drug dealing

life great because he was getting shoes and jewelry. After a few years being in the game, Wes was now a high school dropout, had no job skills, and decided to go live with his Aunt Nicey. Aunt Nicey was a strict person and made it clear from the very first day when Wes moved in that “You need to either get a job or go to school; one of the two, but neither is not an option” (Moore 110). Going to school was not an option for Wes, he decided to be sneaky. While Nicey was out working Wes would be playing video games and then check up on his drug business. He told his aunt that while she was working, he was out looking for a job. Wes would sleep over at his Aunt’s but her house became a place to store drugs. Not taking responsibility for his actions, Wes guided his team of drug dealers so that now they could have profited at least four thousand dollars a day.

When we start facing reality, we realize how our past has affects our future. A few years passed; Wes now had a girlfriend Cheryl who gave him his third and fourth kids. Wes still continued to run the streets until reality hit him like a ton of bricks. “Cheryl, wake up! What the hell is wrong with you?” (Moore 137), Wes yelled as he was trying to revive Cheryl who had just experienced an overdose of drugs. He decided it was time to change his actions and get out of running drugs and the streets. He turned to his friend Levy for advice. Levy, who is younger than Wes, was able to get out of hustling with a major success. He told Wes about the Job Corps where he automatically got hired. By little time that was given, Wes had got his GED in less than a month and was starting to work toward his professional training to work on cars. For the first time in his life, Wes had given himself confidence to move forward in the right direction. however, after a few

temporary jobs that barely paid enough to feed and clothe his kids, Wes went back down hill to running the streets and the drug business so he could earn more money. Not long after Wes got back into the game, Tony and Wes were sentenced to life in jail from robbing a jewelry store and killed a security officer. I see how Wes did not take the opportunities he had for when he decided to get out of the drug business. Whenever he thought times were tough, he wanted to find the easy way out instead of standing up and fighting for what he had worked so hard for. Without taking the full advantage at Job Corps, it came out to be the death of a police man and Wes’s children growing up with no dad around.

Similar to Wes, my Uncle also went through the trials about trying to do the right thing but would always fall back into the same predicament. My uncle, Timothy Chambers was falling in the wrong steps begun by his father, James Chambers Jr., who was an alcoholic. From a bright intelligent kid who was doing very well in school to when he became ten years old, Timothy was broad and smart. When Tim became a teenager that James died on November 18, 1986 in his sleep from an alcohol related heart attack. Tim’s life went downhill ever since. Like Wes; it would be the same routine after school what Timmy’s friends would ask him like Wes’s friends “Yo, you coming out today?” (Moore 28) and start vandalizing properties and get into trouble. My grandmother Evelyn (Tim’s mom) did not want Timothy to fall into the group of out of control kids. But in resulting to her son going downhill, Tim was out all day and night, came home whenever he wanted, and was most often skipping school. It did not take my uncle to long before he started selling and doing drugs. My grandmother reacted the same way as

Tony got onto Wes when he found new shoes in Wes's bedroom and said "Dude, I am going to ask you one more time. Where did you get the money from?" (Moore 69). Evelyn told Timmy that if he would not change his actions, he would be going to a rehab center. I could imagine that what my grandma was saying to my uncle that it was just going one ear out the other, which got him into his first arrest for the possession of marijuana and armed with a weapon. Timothy would call Evelyn pleading with her like saying something similar like in the book, "Ma, I know I haven't been perfect, but I promise to do better. I will pay attention in school and go more often, I will clean my room, I will clean your room" (Moore 95). She treated Timothy like God because he was the baby of seven other children, but did not tolerate the drugs. Wes's mom said to Wes when she found out about the drugs, "Not only did you lie to me but you were selling drugs and keeping them in my house! Putting all of us in danger because of you stupidity. I don't want to hear your sob story about how much you owe. You will stop selling stuff. I will be checking your room and I don't want to ever see it in here again." (Moore 74). Wes's mother showed no pity for Wes and neither did my grandmother towards Timmy. Evelyn also knew that what the path he was going down would catch him in the end. Still being a minor at age 15, my uncle was on parole for seven months but decided to better himself for the sake of his mother.

Tim was just like Wes, deciding how he was going to better his life and no way on how to do it. Being a high school dropout, Wes tried to get a fresh start at a new life at Job Corps. My uncle decided to go to Webster to get his GED in painting and drywall construction in hopes to have a

better future. In 1993, on Thanksgiving Day, my grandmother had suffered a stroke paralyzing her right side which affected her speech. My uncle then went downhill once again by selling drugs, smoking marijuana and started to experience in heroine at age 23. Evelyn now felt helpless, she could no longer tell her youngest son what to do because now he was a grown man making his own decisions. Whenever my uncle had no money for his next high, he would turn to my grandmother who gave in and supported the money for his drug addiction.

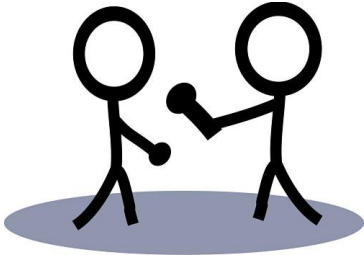
No matter how hard people try to change, there can always be one thing that makes them go downhill again to either being in jail or death. Throughout the years, Timothy would be arrested and in prison for armed robberies, stealing, and breaking into other people's houses. The one thing that my uncle went to jail for was the final straw. He was high on heroin and broke into a house, Tim pulled a knife on a woman and a child and was sent to jail for four years. He had not learned his lesson from the first time he did drugs. My uncle was out of prison on September 28, 2009 and decided once again he would try to do better. Turns out, he succeeded. He was working at a painting and drywall company in St. Joseph Missouri and was staying clean for the first time since he got out of jail. One day, Tim met up with one of his old friends that he use to run with name Dudley. He convinced my uncle to get high with him Timothy was in the trap of getting high. On January 26, 2010 Tim was high on meth and was convinced in his mind that the police were after him, he wanted to get out of St. Joe, so he got in his little white pickup that use to be Evelyn's and went to Kansas City. On the Paseo Bridge, he caused a four wreck collision. To escape, he then jumped off the bridge backwards to get to the river but

ended up landing on his head on the railroad tracks. The paramedics said that he died two times on the way to the hospital. On January 27, 2010 at 8:30 in the morning, my uncle Timmy died at Truman Hospital. That was the hardest time for my whole family and I to face we blamed ourselves because we could of got him the treatments and help he needed but it was too late.

I feel that everybody is responsible for their choices that they make in life. The environment we all grown up in can affect from our past and future, even though we have loved ones who tried their best to keep them out of trouble which lead us to be in jail or six feet underground.

Struggles Through Adoption

Dantana Conway



Who am I? Who do I look like? Why do I like animals? Why am I terrified of spiders? These are the questions that might cross the mind of an adoptive child. There are also many challenges that go along with adoption. A sit down visit with Sally Berten, a family friend, provides us with a first-hand account of growing up as an adoptive child; thus her later decision to adopt.

Meeting with Sally in a quiet room to discuss her life as an adoptive child and now adoptive parent was truly enlightening. Sally began with her eager tone of excitement as I propped myself up in my chair to prepare for an expanded explanation. Obviously, Sally enjoys talking about her being adopted and her adopting a kid of her own. That's where I took place and asked, "How do you feel about your childhood and growing up as an adopted child?" Her response was instant and full of delight with the light in her eye and wide smile stretched across her face. "I feel

gifted, accepted, and I feel like I was purposely put in this place for a reason just as Elias was put into our family for a reason." Then I ventured to the topic of less enthusiasm asking, "Do you know your biological parents, and or do you ever wish to meet them?" Sally's cool response bursts quickly, "I have no reason to meet them. In my eyes, "I don't know them!" I don't know who they are but I've heard of them and I don't find interest in learning anything more about them. God placed me into the home with the family I'm supposed to be with and that's all that matters. I feel special enough to come into a family who made me feel wanted and at home just as I was theirs from the start." Coming from someone with no experience I had to know, "How do you cope with your family now?" She responds with pride, "I make each one feel accepted and loved just as I was. They all have something different about them that I absolutely love. They wanted another sibling and accepted that someone new was coming into our family even if he was different colored. We all grow together as a family and cope through this together"

Today, Sally Berten is ever so grateful being an adoptive child because she has the best parents ever. They provided her with a wonderful life then, now, and will for a lifetime. Sally shares the tradition of learning her adoptive nature, "It wasn't until I was about four when my adoptive mother started reading a book to me about a little boy being adopted. She read it to me every night in a sweet tone

and changed the little boys name to help show many other little kids are adopted too." Sally, who is fair skinned with green eyes, continues the tradition to her own adoptive son Elias, whom is a caramel skinned, dark haired, brown eyed boy. "Every night Elias and I read our teddy bear book which tells a story of a momma teddy bear that adopts a baby teddy bear. In the book it talks about the bears being different colors and that families can be made of people who are different colors. The momma bear tells the baby bear that he is her "wish come true" and that is what she tells her son every night before he goes to bed.

Contrary to popular belief, adoption can be a very trying experience. Beverly Miller, while anxiously waiting to adopt a baby girl, was delighted with the photographs but a lot of unanswered questions remained. As nine months approached there was still no baby. The process was slow and agonizing as Beverly had prepared her to have a newborn now she didn't know what age this child would be when it would arrive. The questions were mounding for Beverly like; she had a name in mind but had she been named something else? Had she been calling someone else momma? Finally, the call came in and at nine months old Sally came to be a new adoptive child to Beverly and Ray Miller.

The decision to adopt was a lifelong desire for Sally but the related hardships

detoured the thoughts for quite a while. Sally explored several options like adopting overseas, the United States, foster parents, and so on. She even considered to not even adopting and having a medical procedure to have another child. There's a lot of chaos with adoption overseas. Not just because the travel part would take a while but the process would be much tougher and a lot more circumstances come with an overseas adoption. The cost, legalities, travel, and everything differs by an excessive amount. Just as the idea had been put to rest as probably not going to happen a breakthrough miraculously presented itself. In Sally's course of work with Parents as Teacher's a friend told her of a known situation where a pregnant mother may be considering adoption. That's then where Sally sat down and talked with her husband Scott Berten and decided to follow through with pursuing this route. Reputedly, this woman was already unable to care for her and the other children she had already birthed so Sally took that into play and came into contact with her. When it came down to it, if this would work it would be best for her and Scott. Sally stayed in touch with this woman preparing to be the mother of this child. On delivery day Sally arrived to the hospital only to later learn after Eli was born the woman had realized maybe this adoption wasn't final just yet. She wanted to wait the first six months of Elias' life to decide. Sally and Scott then got worried after already preparing to bring Elias home so they

resorted to retaining an attorney and set up a court process to file for adoption and finalize the whole process. The circumstance the woman was living in wasn't stable for any more children nor could she take care of herself. Sally won that battle quickly and in no time the adoption was finalized and Elias was home right as a newborn. Between all the hardships they went through she was glad to have signed those tiny slips of paper that finalized the adoption and gifted her "wish come true."

"The biggest obstacle was peoples different perspectives about adoption and judging us and our decision in this situation, said Sally." In most cases you would think children need to live a happy life. Instead, "Ignorant people judge and aren't happy that Elias is going to have a happy home with lots of people to love him and all of his needs are being taken care of. They believe that we are taking this child away from his biological family and where he should be growing up even though they are not a stable family. People think negatively of us for "separating a mother and a child" although his biological mother knew she was not able to able to meet the needs for Elias and I would put him in good hands, Sally expressed." Despite all obstacles almost every adoptive parent would say there special child is there "wish come true" as Sally smiled with a sparkle in her eye. It is confirmation for me that God doesn't create illegitimate children but some parents are and thank goodness for

the Miller's and Berten's of the world that give a new lease on life for the children.

Berten, Sally. Personal Interview. 15, December, 2013.

My Metamorphosis

Court Jensen



The day to leave was finally upon me. As I gazed around the empty room with boxes piled high like skyscrapers. A bittersweet feeling rushed through me. This was once my fortress of solitude, a place I felt safe and content. Now for the first time, I would leave that safety net, striking out on my own. I had hid away in this house for too long, avoiding much needed change. My best friend Jesse would help me break out of the depressive attitude that I had for my uncertain future. Jesse would ask me to be his roommate. Although I was a little hesitant and scared at first, after much thought and consideration I would agree to move in. I had a feeling this would be a step in the right direction for me. It would give a chance to experience life outside of my sheltered and monotonous home life. My new residence would hold many uncharted mysteries. My thoughts raced with giddy anticipation to establish myself in a new setting. I couldn't wait to get to know the people who occupied the apartment complex. The nearby surroundings were

intriguing as well. There were walkways for much needed exercise of the body and the mind. The University across from my apartment complex would be an undeniable eye catcher. I had always flirted with the thought of furthering my education. Now the opportunities to feed my mind and challenge myself were within reach. The fear and lack of self-confidence that plagued me for so many years was subsiding. I was ready to break of my comfort zone and grow with every new experience. Moving out of my mother's house was a significant event that would have many lasting effects. In a way, it was a rebirth, my chance for a fresh start. I begin to push myself in new directions that I would have never explored at my old home. Moving out instilled a sense of self-worth that helped me achieve the goals of returning to an academic setting and writing for a local music publication.

Moving out would help me become even more responsible. I had a place to call my own. My newly acquired abode was my own man cave to customize and to keep orderly. It was a blast giving it a good cleaning and decking it out in décor that gave the place character. Jesse and I would go to a lot of antique shops and estate sells to search for cool items for our pad. No one particular room had a certain running theme, except for my room that was decked out in Star Wars and comic book memorabilia. A few favorite features of the apartment would be the retro stereo cabinet with a slide out turntable. In our

dining room, we have a really cool double sided picture of mountain ranges in Colorado. I would have to say the decorative item I most enjoy is the picture of Tom Selleck as Magnum P.I. that we proudly display in our bathroom. A lot of pride was instilled in me during those various decorating sessions. My roommate Jesse and I would host housewarming dinners for our friends and families. We could hardly contain our excitement in how well the apartment came together. The wheels were in motion; I couldn't let my rebirth end there. My awesome new abode would provide me a safe haven to help maintain and a place I where I could entertain friends and family. Having my own place helped me overcome some of the fear I was facing toward an uncertain future. Moving out was a huge step in the right direction for myself. I was so accustomed to running away from responsibilities but I would need to tackle my fears head on. With each and every new goal I faced I gained a stronger understanding of my self-worth. I now felt that I could independently take on responsibility of maintaining an apartment, achieving academic goals, and developing the skills need to become a respected writer.

My next goal was to find a new job, one better in pay and purpose. I had been working at the same grocery store for over a decade. It was time to leave my monotonous day to day operations behind and to find something of greater value. I

was on the hunt like a madman stocking its prey. I would fill out a plethora of online applications and staffing agencies in hopes of landing something to continue my positive progression. With a place to call my own and a new job on the horizon, I was beginning to chip away the negativity that had been engulfing my life. I was starting to discover this whole new side of me. I was able to strike out on my own and make it. I was no longer an empty vessel on the path to nowhere. I was heading towards a great new adventure aided by a reinvigorated determination and the support of my loved ones. For the longest time I settled for mediocrity and basking in a self-defeatist attitude, it was finally time to discover what I was worth. I felt so blessed that Jesse would ask me to move in. My old life of just work and not much else of substance was taking a toll on my psyche. My new independent life provided with opportunities beyond my wildest dreams. With my newly redefined path, I could finally feel that I am a productive member of society with a voice of my own.

My roommate and best friend Jesse was a key factor in my successful growth period. Jesse was always there for me when I need encouragement and the push in the right direction. Jesse would help me gain more confidence in my culinary skills. At my mother's house I didn't cook all that much. I wanted to be able to do more than make a mess or burn the food. Jesse would take me under his wing like a cooking 'Yoda', he would teach me quick and easy recipes that

I could make on the fly. He would also help me build a resume to get that important edge in my job search. With my self-confidence at an all-time high I was able to move more independent. I got to know the people in my apartment complex; we soon became a tight knit community. The people in my complex were welcoming and supportive in each other goals and ambitions. My new friends would recommend jobs to apply for and I got some insight on college life. For the first time in a long time I felt that I was starting to find my place in this world. I didn't get to see my family as much as I would have liked, though moving away seemed to strengthen my relationships with my mother and family, as well the time I spent with them was not taken for granted. I could see that they were proud of what I had and will accomplish. It was time to do more than entertain the idea of college; I was ready to return to the hustle and bustle of academia.

The idea of getting back into an academic setting after decade of inactivity scared me. I couldn't let the fear detour me from my goal. Once Jesse became a major factor in helping me achieve my goals and keep in my self-worth in check. Jesse would help me get everything in order for my return to higher learning. He would aid me in filling out grants and important documents. Jesse also would help me get the books I needed and act as a campus tour guide. All through the process, I would retain a nervous excitement. My

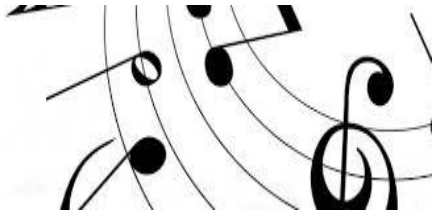
thoughts would race would I find the same success transitioning there as I did with my new home. Jesse's girlfriend, Autumn, would end up bringing forth a pleasant surprise. Autumn knew from her time with me that I was very much into music. She contacted the owner of a local entertainment website and magazine called Tuning Fork. She told him about my passion and knowledge of music. The owner, Tim, agreed to meet with me. Tim and I would hit it off. We both shared an immense passion for local music and creating a top notch publication. I would achieve a great pleasure in writing articles for the magazine and the camaraderie that came with staff meetings. I was finally making it in this world on my own terms and I knew what I was worth. My old life felt really underdeveloped and void of substance. It was a joyous rush to have the experience of living on my own term. It was finally up to me to decide what path in life to walk. It was so important to have the freedom of choice and the responsibilities life presented. I now possessed the drive to mold myself into a better companion to my family and friends, a better student and journalist.

I felt guilty for leaving my Mother; she had just recovered from a triple by-pass heart surgery and losing her big toe to severe infection. I have always been really close to my mom. It would not be an easy transition, but I no longer had the desire to sit idly and watch the world pass me by. Much like 'The Godfather', Jesse would

make me an offer that I couldn't refuse. Ultimately, moving out of my mother's house helped me break the depressive view I had regarding my life. I now I had a sense of direction and purpose to my life. My new environment would usher in a rebirth. I gained a better understanding of what it is to be self-sufficient and prideful in my surroundings. With positive encouragement from friends new and old, I began to set out to achieve goals that I once deemed impossible. With a renewed self-worth, I found the ambition I was searching for and the courage to make my mark in the world. No longer would the word 'change' hold a negative connotation. Change would serve as a beacon to light my way to a bright and prosperous future.

Accidental Songs

Unique Higgins



I believe I can fly
I believe I can touch the sky
I think about it every night and day
Spread my wings and fly away
I believe I can soar
I see me running through that open door
I believe I can fly.....

This was the song I used to sing in my church choir that got me in tuned with writing songs. I would sing this song for hours a day. I woke up with this song in my head and went to bed with this song in my head. This was my favorite song growing up as a child, and somewhat still is today. Songs helped me read and write. I got an understanding of this at a young age. I was able to write whole song when I was in elementary because growing up with a musical background in church it prepared me for my future. When I was younger, I grew up around music in church. I started writing songs as a young child. I would sit there and sing songs in my bedroom from

sun up to sundown. It was intended it just happened. My mom would sit in my doorway for hours to hear what I was singing. We actually would play like we had choir rehearsal in my room sometimes. Those were the days; writing songs helped me express my feelings and thoughts. I was telling my story, till this day I am still telling my stories through my songs. It was a good form of therapy for me growing up. In "Accidental Poetry" I learned that Carol Case started poetry with simple words you learn as a baby. She just used her sound of alliteration to help her create poetry. Growing up she used poetry to express herself, especially when she hit her teen years. She wrote poetry on topics that any young girl or poet would write. I can compare with Carol Case the author of "Accidental Poetry" because she didn't intend to write or even discover poetry. She came across the poetry on accident. Carol stated that "A friend once told me that she wrote because it was cheaper than drugs and therapy". (28). I can agree with her on that because it is a new way of dealing with life, in anything that you do, whether it's writing songs or poetry. Reading and writing can help you discover what you will be. Case and I have decided to let poetry and songs guide us through or journey of life.

When I think of reading and writing, I think of people putting their thoughts on a page for others to read. I think of expressions being portrayed whether they are good or bad. Reading and writing can be used as forms of therapy, a hobby or as a

profession. Those who do use reading and writing in their everyday lives tend to give an aspect on their journey through life. Reading has affected my songwriting in a good way. I was able to read anything at a young age. It helped me understand songs I was writing when I was around 5. I learned how to read different words from choir in my church. I would pick out the different words I felt looked interesting and I would keep singing those over and over again. It helped me when it came to songwriting because as I would sing I wrote down the lyrics and I needed to know how to read in order to correct any mistakes in the songs. Carol Case stated that "I started my poetry by stating goo-goo and da-da". (27). Case explained that she wasn't trying to write or learn poetry on purpose. It just happened. It came to her at a young age and she ran with it all through her growing life. The same has happened to me. Being able to read or write songs was on accident, it wasn't intended for me to grow up and create songs for people to enjoy. Writing plays a big part in my life also because I am able to write song that I feel have meaning to my life. I also feel that the songs I write could help the next person in the future. When I say I could help the next person through my songs, I'm saying that I could write a song about forgiveness and if I get the message across to one person. I could save them from a lot of anger and pain.

Making noises in my house was just me writing songs by thinking out loud and beating my hands on the dresser. In

"Accidental Poetry" Case learned what alliteration was by "hearing her mother in the store list out: tuna, tomatoes, and toilet paper". (27). She explained that alliteration and pleasing sounds are what got her started with writing poetry. The first thing that helped me start my song writing was me taking words that I had learned, and I would sit in my room and start singing the words and after a while I would continue to add more and more words. After being in my room for a good length of time I would end up with a couple of songs. My mom would have to keep telling me to quiet down and quit making loud noises. As I grew older, she would still say that, but I would just ignore her or go outside.

During my teen years, I started to really gain an aspect on songwriting because all of my songs were a little more intimate than when I first started writing. I was writing songs about love, sex, pain, and relationships. I was really secretive and didn't want anybody to read my songs until I went through a bad break up; then that's when I started gaining confidence in my work and let people see a different side of me that they had never seen before. It was like Carol Case whose poetry was more than simple wordplay. She stated that, "I grew less concerned with the words...more concerned with the abstract concepts of love, peace, and justice. (28). Case implied that when she hit an age of puberty, she was very secretive in her poetry because it wasn't all about rhyming. It was more about writing on the aspects of love and her

journey growing up.

Writing songs has helped me tremendously while growing up. They have helped me express my feeling towards life and other people. When I write a song I pick anything I feel has either helped me or tried to break me down. Just like when people have a hobby or activity they do to help them get through life, I have my songs. I have a whole book of songs that are sad, funny, and happy. I tend to write or read when I am angry. It helps me dive into my little world I created. It may seem crazy but when I am writing my songs something happens and when it happens there is no stopping it. If someone wants to get to know me all they would have to do is look in my book of songs because it shows who I really am as a person. My song show that I am human and that I took me years to realize that. I could keep writing on how reading and writing has helped me while writing songs. But I would just be repeating myself. Writing songs is my way of therapy. It helped me through a lot of troubling times and it still does. My escape route in life is thru music and writing. With those two I can't go wrong. So in anything that you do whether it's writing songs or poetry. Reading and writing can help you discover what you will be. Case and I have decided to let poetry and songs guide us through or journey of life.

Midwest Vegan

Jennifer Easton



I can't imagine what it would be like to check the back of every package of food I pick up at the grocery store or never wanting to go out to eat because I'm not sure how my food is being prepared. This is how Toni Embrey, a 36 year old single mother, college student, and manager of a local convenient store lives her life, because she is also a vegan. A vegan is a person who does not consume any animal products or bi products, particularly through diet but also by not purchasing items that are made from animals, for example leather and fur. Toni has been a friend of mine for many years, but we never really talk about her being a vegan because it is just a part of who she is, just like some people are Christian or Catholic. This is what she believes in. I interviewed Toni to get a better understanding to what a vegans' life may be like. In the process I learned choosing to eat a vegan diet for most vegans is not about health, it is about the

lives of the animals and how much the vegan culture cares about the animals. We talked about things that come up in a vegan's daily life including how shopping and preparing food can be challenging and how hard being a vegan can be, especially in the Midwest.

The choice to become a vegan is a personal choice, some vegan's may choose this diet because they are concerned about their health and some choose to be vegans because they do not agree with the treatment of the animals in the food industry. Toni was raised in the Midwest, eating what I would call a normal diet; she adopted this sub-culture when she was nineteen years old. She explained to me how she made this life altering decision: "I knew a couple, who were vegans. I questioned them about their choice and did some research on my own. That's how I learned of the animal suffering in the food industry." In other words, Toni is saying she didn't like how animals were being treated and harmed during the process to becoming food for human consumption. She views this process as cruel and she didn't want to be a part of a culture that believes mistreating animals is okay. According to Toni, "These animals are caged most of their lives, fed or injected with hormones to make them grow bigger, and then led to slaughter." Toni's point is that these animals are unhappy and live a miserable life in captivity. It is a moral decision for Toni; she did not choose this because of health concerns. She believes

every living creature should be living an organic life, running free, mating when their bodies are ready, and eating what they want to eat when they want to eat it. Choosing to be vegan is more than not eating animal products. It is about animal rights. Most vegans choose this diet because they believe every creature has a right to live a happy life.

Vegans must also plan ahead when they are going to the grocery store. I think going to the grocery store is a chore that I would avoid if I could, but after taking a trip to Hy-Vee's health market with Toni I think I have it easy. As we are shopping, Toni is looking at the back of the packages. She explains to me what she is doing: "I see new products on the shelves that look good, but before I buy them I have to look at all the ingredients. There are some food colorings or additives that are made from animals, like gelatin or milk, that are added to food that I do not eat. This makes shopping a food time consuming, but I do not have many options for eating out so I have to make most of my meals from scratch." Toni's point is that a lot of boxed food or prepared foods have added ingredients in them that are made from animals. There is more to being a vegan than not eating meat, poultry, and dairy products. There are many products on the shelves that are made with other animal products. Most of us take for granted the options we have when we shop for food. I see the same products on the shelves I never look at all the ingredients. I usually buy the item to

decide if I like it. Toni admits that after many years of shopping this way she has her staples, but would like more options. Toni adds, "Sometimes I would like to just call for a pizza when I've had a bad day or I am busy." What Toni is saying is that there just aren't many choices for eating out locally, and the convenience of having some vegan restaurants would really help her when she is too busy to cook. This is just not an option for her though; even most of the pizza crusts have ingredients in them that she will not eat. She has found only one place locally that has a thin crust that does fit into her diet. The vegan community is not very big in the Midwest and the options are slim when it comes to choosing to eat vegan. Toni does not claim to be healthy or choose to be a vegan for health reasons as most vegans don't. Vegans are caring individuals who sometimes seem to care more about the animals than themselves, so they spend a lot of time and energy just trying to save as many animals as they can by not eating any animal products and this is easier said than done.

For Toni, living in the Midwest as a vegan is a challenge every day. Even though she has been a vegan for seventeen years, her son is the only other vegan that lives in her daily life. She mentioned that she was introduced to this subculture by another couple, but they have since moved away. I have been friends with Toni for many years and have learned that she does not attend very many social functions, because there is usually food she will not eat being served.

Toni explains, "When I do attend a function where there is food being served, I feel like everyone is uncomfortable, because I usually don't eat or I bring my own food. I feel like I don't fit in." In other words, Toni feels left out and feels like there is too much attention drawn to her difference. She would just like to be part of the crowd and not have to talk about her eating habits. She did not choose to be a vegan because she wanted to be different. She chose this because this is what she believes is the right thing to do. Toni explains, "Some people don't understand me choosing to be a vegan and tend to think I am a hippie. Others think that I am judging them for what they eat. I do not think about it this way, this is my choice for my own reasons." Toni's point is that people tend to think that she is a vegan to be different or to make a political stand. This is her belief and she does not judge others for the food choices they make. Talking about food makes her very uncomfortable. Not having any family or friends who are vegans sometimes makes her feel isolated. She has adapted to this by not placing herself in situations where she will have to discuss food. That is a challenge all by itself. The vegan subculture does not seem to be very common in the Midwest. According to Toni, "People can be disrespectful of the vegan culture. They become very confrontational when I tell them I am a vegan and will sometimes argue with me about the way I eat." Toni's point is that because she lives in the Midwest, where

there are many farms and cattle ranchers. The vegan culture is not seen as a healthy way to live. This is a stereotype; a vegan diet is just as healthy as a meat eater's diet, only they get their calcium and protein from plants and soy. These stereotypes only exist because in the Midwest we are uneducated about this subculture. I am positive this happens in other parts of the country too, but not as often. Living here can be hard because this is not the norm, but this is where her family is. Vegans are very caring human beings who are just standing up for what they believe in, the rights of animals. They are not a threat to anyone.

Since this interview, I have made two trips to the grocery store and I found myself looking at all the ingredients of new products that I want to try and even some of the products that I already use. I do not have the time or energy to eat a vegan diet, but this is important to my friend and it has made me think about what I can do to contribute to her cause even in the slightest ways. I will be careful not to judge others of their differences in the future and try to make them as comfortable as possible in social situations. Just because someone is different doesn't mean I cannot learn something from them, even if I am not a part of their subculture.

Useful Education

Jennifer Easton



When I was a child school was a place I went to socialize and read books and learn new things. I enjoyed school and missed going during winter and summer breaks. I'm not sure I learned much while I was in the building, but I found school comforting, a place I blended in. I may have liked school but was not encouraged to do anything but the minimum required. In "School vs. Education" Russell Baker suggests that Americans get most of their education outside the school building and in school learn to tell the teachers what they want to hear so that they can graduate high school. He also mentions that we do not become truly educated until we are interested in the material. Much like author Russell Baker says, I received most of my education from outside sources. I did okay in school, but this was not because I was learning. I just knew how to take a test. I have been out of school for 18 years. This does not mean I have not been getting an education; I have acquired most of my education since that day, because I was

finally interested.

I learned very young in life how to tell others what they wanted to hear, it was no surprise I could pass a test. I don't even remember school really. Everything important that I learned happened out of the classroom or after graduating high school – that was when my education really began. Graduating was important to get a job. That is what my parents told me for the four years I attended high school. All that mattered was graduating. It didn't matter if I could remember the material. In "School vs. Education" Russell Baker suggests that children are trained to memorize information so they can pass a test, to not look any further than the information that is given to them. For example he says, "During formal education, the child learns that life is for testing. This stage lasts twelve years, a period during which the child learns that success comes from telling testers what they want to hear" (225). Baker's point is that children are not being educated; they are simply learning to mimic what their teacher has told them. They do not retain any of the information and use it in their lives. I believe this is what happened to me as a child. I learned to make others happy with my answers without ever fully understanding the material. When I graduated, I was expected to have the answers, because I was a high school graduate after all. I did not have the answers because no one had prepared me for the test of life. My first job interview was proof of that. I went to that interview

ready to tell them whatever they wanted to hear, but upon arriving I realized no one had prepared me for this. I had no answers. I could not even tell them what I was skilled to do, because I did not have any skills. I had not been educated. I was just another statistic.

If only I had spent more time studying and less time watching television. The time I spent in front of that television is still more vivid in my memory than the time I spent learning in the classroom. According to Russell Baker, "From television, the child will have learned how to pick a lock, commit a fairly elaborate bank holdup, prevent wetness all day long, get laundry twice as white, and kill people with a variety of sophisticated armaments"(225). Basically, Baker is saying that children acquire most of their knowledge from the television. What they are learning is making them into the citizens they will become and he believes most of what they are learning is negative. I agree with Barber that a lot of my education came from the television, although television was different when I a child. I used the television to teach me how I was supposed to act in society and how families interact with each other. I spent many of my evenings after school learning from that television. We may have only had a few channels, but I watched all the sitcoms that I could in order to learn how to be a good child. In these sitcoms, the well behaved children would do their chores, do their homework, and stay out of their parent's way. I was that child, not because

someone took the time to teach me, but because the television said this is how a child should act. This was not a good education, for I was always so unsure if I was interpreting the information correctly. I guess I was lucky we had decent television when I was young. Just like Baker is in insinuating, my parents were not paying attention and had no idea what I was learning from the television. This object was raising me, educating me, and they were taking the credit. I am all grown up now and I still use the television to educate me today, only now I know the difference between pretend and reality.

My parents educated me in a different way. As a child I was very interested in how things were done, why they were done a particular way, and how others interacted with one another. I believe most human beings learn from example and experience. As Baker puts it, "From watching his parents, the child, in many cases, will already know how to smoke, how much soda to mix with whiskey, what kind of language to use when angry, and how to violate the speed laws without being caught" (225). Baker's point is that children are very visual and are learning from the examples their parents provide. The negative examples make more of a lasting impact. I agree with Baker because growing up I learned a lot of information just by listening to my mother or watching her reaction. For instance I was told over and over throughout my life that school was important, but when I would

bring home my homework and ask her for help with my assignments, my mother would get angry and tell me that I should have paid more attention in class. The truth is that she was either too consumed in her own life to take the time to help or she was just as confused as I was. I learned from her anger to get help from another source if I really wanted to do well in school.

Although my mother never meant any harm, she had taught me that if I did well in school it would be entirely up to me. So that is what I did, I learned to watch what was being taught and not to ask questions. In return I got passing grades, but not an education. Still to this day I am a shy person and spend many hours looking up answers that I could get very easily if I would just ask for help.

It wasn't until I had children that I finally decided that I truly wanted to learn. I have learned more from my children than any other source in my life. They have such curious minds and are always talking about what they are going to be when they grow up. Most of my education has come from just living life. I not only wanted to learn, I needed to learn some things. As Russell Baker puts it in his writing, "Afterward, the former student's destiny fulfilled, his life rich with Oriental carpets, rare porcelain, and full bank accounts, he may one day find himself with the leisure and inclination to open a book with a curious mind, and start to become educated" (226). Baker's point is that we truly start to learn when we have achieved the goals that others have placed

upon us and the information is interesting to us. Mostly I agree with Baker's point. When I was young, I wanted to learn about everything, but no one wanted to take the time to educate me or instill in me to take advantage of the education that was being offered to me, so after some time I just became uninterested. It wasn't until I had children that I realized that I was still that curious child and I wanted to become educated. My children have made me wonder, if someone had supported me and took the time to encourage my goals, would I have learned more. I am curious to find out if all those goals I had when I was young are reachable, now that I am more confident and have the proper support from the people around me. My son would often talk to me about what college he wanted to attend when he grew up and I believe he was curious to know if this goal was within his reach. I believe with the proper encouragement his goals can be accomplished. When I graduated from high school, I was not interested in more schooling, but now that I am grown up and aware of my strengths and weaknesses, I think I am ready to become educated. Besides, how can I push the importance of education to my children if I do not set an example? I am now in the first semester of college and my experience this far has been different than any other schooling I have ever had. This time, I am here to learn. I understand myself better now and outside sources do not affect my learning as much anymore, because this is my choice. After

this graduation, I hope to show up to my next job interview with knowledge and skills to offer. I feel that this time around I will be more comfortable with myself and the education I have received, because this time I will be interested and supported.

According to Russell Baker in, "School vs. Education," school teaches students that tests are what make them who they are, but we are truly getting our education from life and other outside sources. We only acquire education if we have an interest in the subject being taught. My experience has been both similar and different because I did want to learn when I was a child but was not encouraged to do any more than the minimum required. If I was surrounded by people who cared more about my education and not just my test scores, I might have tried harder. Graduating was what was important and passing tests was the only thing that would get me to that point. Most of my education came from my day to day living. I did not know how important my education would be until I had graduated and became an adult myself. After having children of my own I have realized that as Americans we may talk about education being important but through our actions we show that we do not care at all. If the American public does not start putting education first, our country will have no leaders to follow someday.

A Positive Outcome to Reading

Courtney Yount



Literacy is the ability to inquire knowledge and build skills with reading and writing. In our nation today, students are struggling to become literate. Data has shown that even the most educated Americans are actually very illiterate. The cause of this is due to students being not required and not willing to learn how to read and write. Families, too, are not providing an environment at home for learning. Families aren't reading to their kids, and if that isn't bad enough, they aren't even providing books for them. In the essay "One Writer's Beginnings" by Eudora Welty, Welty talks about her life growing up with books, and how books affected her education in a positive way. Welty had tons of books in her house, which she read and learned from. In my own experience, books were around in my younger years. My mother would make sure that I had books in my presence. I would read books that I could read, or that my mother and I could read together. It wasn't until about

elementary school that my reading became less frequent. I only read when I was in school and got a grade for it. Reading became something I had to do instead of something I looked forward to do. It is similar to the essay, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books" by Richard Rodriguez. Rodriguez, in his early elementary years, thought of reading as a necessity and not an activity. He had trouble with reading, but overcame that problem with help from a teacher. Rodriguez's ends up changing his thoughts on reading, and starts reading lots of books. Just like Rodriguez, I have changed my thoughts about reading. I have learned over the years of my education that reading is essential to not only a good education, but to becoming a smart, intellectual, and literate person. Reading has now created a journey for me to keep exploring the world around me. I keep on learning new and exciting things that I wouldn't have if I didn't read. For example, a good vocabulary, a sense of the different people in the world, and how to write. For Welty, Rodriguez, and myself, reading has turned out to be a positive learning experience.

During someone's childhood, some parents will read to their children to expand their knowledge and create a mind full of imagination. However, not all parents will read to their kids, or even supply books in the house for them to read. That was not the case for Eudora Welty. In her essay "One Writers Beginnings," Welty was exposed to books at a very young age. Her

parents made books the foundation of knowledge and communication. Welty explains,

My father was all the while carefully selecting and ordering away for what he and Mother thought we children should grow up with. They bought first for the future. Besides the bookcase in the living room, which was always called "the library," there were encyclopedia tables and dictionary stand under windows in our dining room. (299)

Welty explains here how she expanded her knowledge through the books she was exposed too. Her father always has some type of books in the home. Welty's father couldn't afford a lot of things, but that was no excuse for not having books in the home. He would only buy for what he thought his children needed. Welty's father knew that books would provide a great future for his children, so he bought them books. Books would be the foundation for becoming a true educated and literate person. The books he supplies were not the types of books you would see in a home full of children. Instead, he supplied his family with dictionaries and encyclopedias to read and learn from. In my own experience, I grew up with books all around me. I didn't have a formal "library" in my home, but my mother and I would make frequent stops to the public library. I would select books that I could read from, and that my mother and I could read together. Just like Welty's father,

my mother wanted me to have a great future. As a child I remember reading all the Dr. Seuss books. Some of my favorites were "The Cat in the Hat", and "Green Eggs and Ham". With all the rhyming words and fancy illustration, those books made my imagination wonder. When I actually starting reading more advanced books, I would always grab fictional books. Fictional books allowed me to enjoy some part of reading. I would try to create a picture in my head with the stories which allowed me to take a journey with the book. As I stated getting more active in sports my reading dwindled. I lost that passion and drive to grab a book. Instead, my passion and time went to the sports I was participating in like dancing and soccer. Just recently in college I started to read more, and I am actually enjoying it. I believe that my knowledge has expanded due to reading again. I also believe that becoming a more active reader again has helped me succeed in my ENG 100 class. Even though books have always been part of Welty's life and not so much of mine, both Welty and I had similar experiences with being exposed to books early in life. Although Welty and I had different books to choose from, the early exposure of reading books allowed us to have a foundation for becoming a well-educated person.

Writing can be a difficult task to achieve, but reading gives you the opportunity to succeed in learning and become a strong writer. I started to notice my struggle with writing at the beginning of

middle school. That's when I actually learned how to write a five paragraph academic paper. In my 6th grade English class, we were assigned to write a five paragraph essay on what improvements that can be made to the school lunch system. I felt confident about my paper that I wrote. However, Mrs. Kopp, my English teacher, didn't think so. My writing style was inaccurate, and I needed to work on my grammar mistakes. She also suggested that I go to a tutor after school to get extra help because I wasn't applying enough time and effort in class, even though I was working harder than any other student. From then on I hated English. I wanted nothing to do with reading or writing. Every year I would just push myself through English because no matter how hard I tried, I wasn't getting any more skilled in the English department. I lost all hope, until I came to college. It was then I started to read more frequently and noticed that English class was becoming easier. Reading was improving my writing skills. In Welty's essay, she infers that reading helped her learn how to write. Welty says,

I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me- as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting-into knowledge of the word, into reading and spelling, by the way of the alphabet. They taught it to me at home in time for me to begin to read before starting to school. (301)

What Welty explains here is how reading

and the alphabet developed her own rhythm of words. Welty used words from reading and alphabet letters to help her write. In my case, reading again is helping me find my own rhythm of words. Those rhythm of words are not only being expressed in English class but in my journal. My journal lets me express the Eating Disorder thoughts I have, so it distracts me from acting out on restricting behaviors. Reading has not only helped me succeed with my education, but will be beneficial to my life in the future.

Not everyone loves to read, but reading is a very important part of life. Reading lets your imagination wonder and to help us forget about our worries. For a lot of people reading can be lonely and boring, and have no propose. Not many people understand the importance of reading. At the beginning of Rodriguez's essay, Rodriguez struggled with reading. He didn't see reading as a fun and educated activity. Rodriguez says, "Reading was, at best, only a chore. I needed to look up whole paragraphs of words in a dictionary" (294). Rodriguez didn't see the importance in looking up words he didn't know. He thought that reading was something that he had to do and not something he wanted to do. Rodriguez didn't want to spend time just looking up words. Reading was only a necessity and not an activity to embrace in. Much like myself, I only saw reading as something I had to do. Teachers would assign homework to everything I read. Reading never seemed important to me. My

sports were more important because I knew I could get someone in life with being athletic. Reading to me at the time seemed to be nerdy. I needed to put in hard work, instead of being lonely with a book. I soon changed my mind about reading when I entered college. My English 100 class opened my eyes. English 100 allowed me to find the purpose for reading. One purpose was not only to become more educated but to use writing as a communication system between the eating disorder and myself. Books would also give me the opportunity to be successful and become a well-educated person I can be. For Rodriguez, he also changed his prospective on reading. By the fourth grade, Rodriguez was reading anything that was recommended to him. He would challenge himself for reading every book from "must read lists." For both Rodriguez and myself, reading was not just words a page, but become an important and valuable aspect to our lives.

Overall, Both Welty and Rodriguez essays were a great way for me to see the importance of literacy in my life. I can relate to both essays by having all our experiences turn out in a positive way. In the essay "One Writers beginnings," I felt proud that Welty and I could have the opportunity to be exposed to books early in life. However, I didn't take advantage of having books, instead I thought of reading as only a waste of time. I am proud to say that I now have changed my prospective on reading, and view it as an essential part of life, just like

Rodriguez did in the essay "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." For Welty, Rodriguez, and myself, reading has been a great learning journey. I only hope that other people can take a journey with reading and see all the positive outcomes that come out of it.

Living Country Style

Courtney Yount



People live in different populated areas of the country. Some populated areas are so big that your neighbors live arm's length from you. Other areas on the other hand are so small, that you don't see a house for miles. These populated areas make our culture identity. The population depends on how you are identified in our culture. Marjorie Anderson, a lawyer in Kansas City, grew up in a small town. Anderson states, "I grew up in a town called Dawn, Missouri with only 100 people living in it." Anderson grew up living in the country. This culture was where chickens roamed free, coyotes howled, and you feed baby calves with bottles. As Anderson was flashing back on her life growing up, I could see her lighten up. Anderson says, "The country was always quiet and peaceful." Basically, the country gave Anderson a place to relax. Anderson also had a rough life living in such a rural area. Anderson explains, "The country is very isolating because it's away from all the action." In other words, Anderson didn't have a lot of

opportunities with activities, friends, and fun. Anderson didn't really have many friends. The ones she did have felt like they were her brother and sisters. Having limited friends and doing chores all the time took a toll on her. I believe from talking with Anderson that was what made her a stronger person. Anderson learned to persevere and never gave up when things were hard. Anderson's country life gave her work ethic, determination, and basic life skills. Country life prepares you for the real world by working for everything you want and need. In fact, living this country has helped Anderson be the person she is today, and without it she wouldn't have been as successful

Anderson success came from being active in such a rural community. So far, Anderson success has given her a great career. She is a 54-year-old, lawyer, but really isn't the typical lawyer. Anderson states, "I didn't know what I could pursue as a career because of the limited academic options going to such a small school." In other words, Anderson didn't get the best of education. Her school was so rural that several towns in that area formed the district. They offered the most basic and limited courses. Anderson loved to learn, so she would read any newspaper, old books, and even her brother's political books. I was the same way in school. I always felt like I needed to learn more than I was given because it made me smart. The more knowledge, the better. Anderson maybe didn't have a lot of options academically,

but she did when it came to sports. Anderson explains, "I was forced to be active and participate in all the extra circular activities they offered." In regards to the schools extra circular activities, going to such a small school, everybody had to participate. Participation basically meant she had no choice but to support the school, either with sports, clubs, organizations etc. Anderson wasn't very athletic, so having outstanding sports wasn't going to help her with academics. Anderson was determined to expand her horizons. She would take her old beaten down pick-up to the local library and read lots of books. In the 70's computers weren't available, so books were all the resources she had. Anderson's knowledge expanded so far that she achieved a 29 on her ACT. That was a record for Southwest R-1. When Anderson told me that I was so proud of her. She wanted more for herself than what she was given. It wasn't the schools fault it's just because rural towns can't fund a lot of academic options that other schools got. I flashed back in time when I wanted more for myself. I was excelling in dance, and the dance studio I was at couldn't teach me anymore. I was beyond their highest levels. I was determined to become a dancer professionally, so I changed dance studios. Pricilla and Danas was the new studio, and they helped me grow physically and emotionally as a dancer. I believe that both Anderson and I fought for what we wanted. We didn't just sit around waiting for it, but went out and pursued our dreams. In other

words, country life gave Anderson the ability to fight for her life and education to better herself.

Anderson had more to do than just school and sports. If that wasn't enough, she had to live life as a country girl and work hard for everything. She didn't get to just live the dream of being a normal teenager, but had to work for her parents on the farm. Anderson states, "I had chores from sun up to sun down." Basically, Anderson would put in all her extra time to help out around the farm. Her parents had the motto, "work for what you need." Their whole family would work to survive. For example; growing their own crops, butchering cattle, and pump the well for water. Anderson says, "I worked not for clothes or nice things, but for the necessities needed to survive which gave me work ethic." The country gave Anderson the opportunity to appreciate the value of life more. Life wasn't meant to just be handed to you. People needed to work for what they needed. The country life made you work for everything you needed because stuff wasn't accessible. Grocery stores and necessities were miles away. Anderson made me wonder more if I am appreciative enough. I have never had to work for anything I needed. My parents just gave me what I needed. I want to start working for things I need now instead of things I want. The work ethic that country life gave Anderson, gave her the career she always have wanted.

The country life can, though, become isolating at times. Anderson states, "The country is quieter which is nice, but nobody would be around for miles which can be very isolating." She enjoyed that her town, Dawn, wasn't busy all the time, but at times wasn't busy enough. Anderson lived in a town where she knew everyone. If Anderson wasn't related to the people she knew, then she considered them brothers and sisters. Anderson didn't have the opportunity to make a lot of friends. Living in such a rural town you knew only a selected few people because it was so small. She felt alone a lot of the times, and she thanks God that she had chores to do in the meantime. I went to school with 1000 kids, and I sometimes wish I went to such a rural school. Everywhere I turned there was a click or group with no empty room to join. I didn't even know a lot of the people I went to school with and wish I could have. Anderson grew to like knowing fewer people because they would always be her friend. She could count on her friends because they only had each other and all stuck together. Going to such a big school, like I did, there were so many different types of people. There was the jocks, hicks, the addicts, the preps, and many more. The school wasn't just made up of one subculture, so it was hard to find the friend that would always have your back. Anderson maybe didn't have a lot of options on friends, but had those few close friends that would last a lifetime. I sometimes wonder if my eating disorder

wouldn't have been as severe if I had those few close friends that I could relate too. I was always trying to find a group that I could be a part of. I seem to not really relate to any of them, so my eating disorder was always one thing I could turn to. I know exactly how it feels to be isolated. My eating disorder was my only friend, and the only one friend that I wanted. I am trying to break out of my shell and meet new people. Anderson met new people in her career. Country life gave her the ability to relate and become close with others. Anderson got the ability to trust and build stable relationships with people because she knew only a select few people. Anderson's ability to create such strong relationships help her become a lawyer. She continues to meet new people and they never would have guessed she was born and raised as a country girl.

Anderson's determination and work ethic to be successful in life has influenced me to make some changes to mine. I was always given everything I wanted, and that's not life. Anderson worked for food, and I didn't have to work at all. I have recently started looking for a part-time job, maybe as a dance teacher. I can use that money for necessities I need. I believe that's a start for realizing how expensive I really can be. She even gave me some hope. Anderson maybe grew up in a small town with limited academic options, but she found a way to better herself. I have limited myself, and let the eating disorder control my path in life. I want to start working hard

to better myself. I recently called my therapist and dietitian to increase my appointment visits, and get involved in support groups. Anderson reminded me that, “don’t let where you came from or what happened to you affect how you move forward.” Living in the country gave Anderson the opportunity to realize that. Just like Anderson, I have to learn to persevere, and found those qualities to better my life.

Roadblocks to a Better Education

Courtney Yount



Education impacts everyone in their life, from learning basic life skills to graduating college with a Bachelor's degree. In the article "Nation still at risk" by Chester E. Finn, Jr., Finn addresses that the education system in America is still behind and in trouble. The education system has tried to make some improvements through the "excellence movements" (242). They now are applying graduation requirements and holding teachers and school administrators accountable for performance. However, the education system is still behind other countries because of less time in the classroom and not a tough curriculum. Education is becoming about testing and not about the process and dedication to be knowledgeable. In my own experience, education has not been about the process, but more about how good your grades can be and how well you can take a test. My schooling has mostly been in the Kearney School District, where I spent countless

hours of hard work to get me ready for the hardest part of education. I spent eighteen years getting ready for college. During four of those years, I faced roadblocks that impacted my education. I also spent a lot of my time outside the classroom due to being hospitalized so many times. Learning was on myself and not if I entered the classroom. Other obstacles I faced was being told I was always doing well with school, and being challenged enough with the curriculum given. It wasn't until I came to college I realized that I wasn't doing well but behind, and the curriculum wasn't challenging enough. In Finn's essay, he claims that there are obstacles that are impacting achievements for a better education. Much like Finn states with Americans, I believe that the obstacles I faced in my earlier years of education are impacting my educational experience now.

Obstacles are impacting the improvement of education in America and me. One of the obstacles is simply that nobody understands that there is a problem with the education system in America. Finn explains:

The first of the obstacles is widespread denial. Most Americans appear to agree the nation as a whole is experiencing some sort of educational meltdown, but simultaneously persist in believing that they and their children are doing satisfactorily. One of the questions asked by the international math and science study cited above

was whether the thirteen-year-olds who took the test considered themselves “good at mathematics.”

The American youngsters, while trailing their agetates everywhere in terms of actual proficiency, led the pack when it came to self-regard. (246)

What Finn explains here is very ironic. Americans are actually very behind other countries in terms of education, but are the most confident in how well they are doing. In our society, we are told that we are doing fine with education and how well the educational system is doing. But in fact Americans are far behind other countries. The problem simply starts with that nobody believes or even wants to believe that the educational system in America is doing poorly. I too have experienced some sort of denial. I never thought that I lacked in my education. There was no reason for me to believe so due to the fact I had proficient grades and always did well on exams. I started to question how well I was actually doing in school when I took the ACT. I took the test five times and the highest I received was a 20. I tried so hard to improve the score but nothing seemed to help, not even the practice exams. The same thing happened when I entered college. I felt that I was prepared, but in actuality I was ill prepared. I was lacking in English and reading, and when professors asked me to write a three page paper in MLA format, I looked at them as if they were speaking a different type of language. The problem was not that I was in denial,

but that nobody said that being weak in some areas was a problem. I was accepted by all the colleges that I applied with academic scholarships, and was in the top ten percent of my class. If I was really that intelligent, then how can I not write a three page paper? The denial in myself and the education system has made me behind in my college English course. How much I lacked in English never crossed my mind because I was excelling in all my other courses. Coming to college made me realize that excelling in all the other courses wasn't going to help me face my English fears of writing long papers and reading essays. If my educators and I would have addressed the problem earlier, I wouldn't be as far behind.

A big part of improving ones education is the time they devote to studying and learning. I always wanted to study or learn something new. I would love solving the hardest math problems, study more bones and muscles than necessary, and finding molecular formulas in chemistry. However, I never really devoted a lot of my time writing or reading. I would never sit down and write my papers until the last minute or just simply write one paragraph summarizes. Reading was the same. I never read books, magazines, or newspapers unless I had to. In the essay Finn explains why some people, including myself, devote more time to certain tasks than others. Finn says, “People tend to learn that which they study, and to learn it in a rough proportion to the amount they

spend on the task” (248). What Finn reveals here is so true. In my case, I know that I am weaker in English with reading and writing skills. Therefore, I don’t devote as much time to work on improving these skills. If I don’t like English then why would I continue to do it and practice it? The answer simply is that I had to. English was the foundation to build upon in any other course. If I didn’t have English in my education process, I wouldn’t be able to excel in the rest. Finn proves my point when he says, “It is no mystery what needs doing. It is, rather, a matter of the will to do it” (249). What Finn states here is to devote time to things you may not like doing, but rather needs to be done. As for me, I need to devote as much time as I do on other courses, such as Math and Science, to English. English is just as important. Devoting time to studying and learning will keep on building a path to a good education.

Education is a process that takes steps so one can achieve a certain goal. One step that was lacking in my educational process was a clear goal I was wanting to reach. Due to various hospitalizations during my last final years in high school I lost that goal I wanted to achieve. My time spent in a classroom was very sporadic. I was worried I was going to even graduate. Therefore, I set my goal to graduate. I found ways to achieve one of the most important diplomas I would receive to further my education and future. In the essay “A Nation Still at Risk”, Finn explains how education is a process that needs to be

taken to reach a certain goal, like I wanted to achieve. Finn says,

In education, as in any enterprise that strives to turn one thing into another, the normal way to begin is by describing as clearly as possible the product one proposes to create. With specifications in hand, it then becomes possible to design a system that will yield the desired result. (247)

What Finn tells here is the ways to take steps to get where one wants to get with their education and strive for it. Much like myself, I worked consistently and directly with a counselor and tutors to make sure I would graduate. I was given expectations for me to achieve, so I could continue on with my education. Granted this isn’t the normal educational goal to achieve, but my health was more important at the time. This was a specialized curriculum, but I started with an end result and goal first, and then developed the path and program on how to get there. Goal setting is a step needed to take in order for improving the quality of an education.

The essay “A Nation Still at Risk” by Chester E. Finn Jr. is a great way to see the improvements needed to achieve a better education. Obstacles such as denial, not devoting enough time to studying and learning, and the lack of efforts to set a clear goal are reasons Americans as a whole are behind other countries. These certain obstacles are impacting the improvement for achieving the best overall education one

can receive. Much like myself, my education has been limited due to these obstacles, but I overcame them. If we can overcome and face these limitations and roadblocks in our education then improvements can start being made. Until then, the nation will continue to lack a good quality education.

A Military Education

Angie Patterson



The military has always fascinated me. When I was eight years old I saw a picture of my cousin in his dress uniform. I asked my dad about his uniform and he explained that each branch of the military had different dress uniforms. This led to a discussion about what each of the branches of service did to protect our nation. To this day I am still curious about what it would be like to be in the military. One of my closest friends used to be in the Navy. He served for six years, and grew up in a military family. With these experiences, I felt that Jason was the right person to take my questions about military life to. He was sitting in front of his computer when I came in. He spends most of his time in front the computer since he is a computer programmer now. I learned some unexpected things as we talked late into the night. After our discussion, I understood that the military is a lot of hard work and that it can be hard on the families of servicemen. However, serving your country can be a fulfilling choice in life. Having

something in your life that is meaningful and gives you purpose is important. Many people go through life feeling lost; the military is a place that can give their life purpose.

I think I always knew that being in the military was hard, but until I talked to Jason I never really understood how physically demanding it actually was. Jason is a pretty hefty guy but evidently he wasn't always that way. When I asked him if boot camp was hard he said, "When I arrived at boot camp I was five-foot-two and a little over a hundred pounds. I could barely do two push-ups." I had trouble picturing him that small. As long as I have known him he has always been a big guy. I have seen him lift his children and mine, a total of five kids, like it was a normal thing to be able to lift that much at once. So he has always been really strong to me. I can't picture him only being able to do two push-ups. He described some of the things his drill instructor made him do while he was in boot camp. Things like having to get up at four-thirty every morning and running what he thought was only a mile and a half but turned out to be three miles. I couldn't imagine having to get up that early and run three miles. I can't even function at that hour, and I don't think I could even run a mile at any time of the day. Jason talked about how boot camp transformed him. He told me, "When I finished boot camp I was in the best shape of my life, I was six foot tall and a hundred and seventy-five pounds of lean muscle. I could run a mile and a half

in ten minutes and do two hundred push-ups on command.” In boot camp, Jason underwent drastic physical changes. When he arrived at boot camp he was really awkward and skinny, afterwards he was toned and in the best shape of his life. Doing two hundred push-ups sounds impossible, but amazing at the same time. I now understand how much hard work it is to get into that kind of shape. After talking with Jason I understood that the military not only teaches you how to protect your country but it also gets you into shape for a healthier lifestyle.

After boot camp, military life was still hard but in a different way. The challenges weren’t physical anymore. When I asked Jason what he liked the least about being in the military he said, “The long hours while we were at sea were the worst. Each of us was expected to work an eight hour day followed by an eight hour watch. We were then expected to perform any other duties like cleaning the berthing compartment or preparing our uniforms for inspections. There were no days off when we were at sea and each day of work lasted between seventeen and twenty hours. The work was repetitious and very boring, but necessary to keep the ship running. Sometimes this would go on for up to three months without a break.” In the Navy the work is strenuous and tiring but is something that has to be done. They work many hours, every day for months at a time. Working for long hours is mind-numbing but it is something that they

have to get used to doing so that the ship can function. I believe I would go crazy being out to sea for three whole months, but I guess if you are kept busy like they are then time would go by a little faster. I now have a better idea of how much work it takes just to keep things running on a ship. I have more appreciation for the Navy than I did before because I never really knew what they did when they were out to sea until I talked to Jason. Working hard is a good way to build stamina; it prepares you for jobs that you don’t necessarily like but sometimes have to do in order to provide for your family.

Evidently life in the military is not just hard on the person serving but it’s also difficult for their family. Jason had some experience with this as well. His father was in the Navy for twenty years and was away at sea during much of his early childhood. I asked Jason what it was like growing up as a military brat and he replied, “At times it was hard...I watched my mom struggle everyday trying to raise four kids. She didn’t have any friends or family that she could turn to for help. Every couple of years we would move and since she was from a small town she had a hard time making friends.” Jason had to deal with a lot of personal things, which most children don’t have to deal with, because his dad wasn’t home all the time. He had to watch how hard it was on his mother trying to raise four kids by herself and constantly uprooting their family was also very demanding. Moving often is stressful on children because it isn’t easy

making new friends, especially if you have to move in the middle of the school year. What people don't realize is that it is also hard for some adults as well. I am a single mother of three kids so I know how hard it is to raise children alone. Thankfully, I have family and friends that help me. I believe I would be very depressed if I didn't have anyone to talk to. I can't imagine what it would be like to not have any support at all. Leaving their families at home is a tough decision all servicemen make, but they do it for their country and their families. Anyone who decides to join the military must be willing to sacrifice time with their family in order to protect the ones that they love.

Being in the military can't be all bad; otherwise, no one would join. Despite all of the bad things that happened to Jason while he was at sea, when I asked him how he felt when he was deployed he answered that he couldn't wait to get underway. I then asked Jason what he liked most about being in the military and he said, "I liked traveling the world...I really enjoyed meeting people from different cultures and seeing how they lived. I also enjoyed eating all the different foods that the world had to offer. I liked the thought of standing in places or walking down roads that people thousands of years before had stood in or walked down." In the military you have the opportunity to see many different countries and experience lots of new things. You make memories that will be with you for the rest of your life. I can see how traveling the world would be rewarding, it

would be really interesting to be able to see how other cultures live and the different things they eat. Their different lifestyles would be exciting to learn. I would love to travel the world and see other countries. These are things I would never be able to afford to do but are common experiences for people in the military. Traveling the world enriches your life by exposing you to different people and their cultures.

Jason and I had been talking for hours and he had answered the questions I had about the military. I had learned how truly difficult life in the military was; both for the person serving and for their family. I realized how rewarding a career in the military could be even though it was extremely challenging. As it got later, I thought of one more question to ask Jason. I wondered if he would encourage his own children to join the military. He paused and didn't answer me for a few minutes. Then he looked me in the eye and said, "I would; I think that the military gives young adults a place to figure out their lives. I think I would still tell them all the good and the bad things because I would want them to understand their decision...I feel that military service is an important civic duty that any able bodied American should perform." I completely agree with Jason, I think that it is a person's duty to serve their country any way they can. I have a lot of respect for Jason on the fact that he would tell his children the good and the bad things about the experiences he had so that they can make an informed decision on whether

or not they still wanted to join. Hearing about his experiences made me wish that I had joined the military.

Self Doubt

Angie Patterson



At an early age, I knew that I hated writing. Every time I sat down to write my mind would go blank. I never heard the voice of inspiration; the only voice in my head was mocking me. My path to literacy was not as joyful as Carol Case's, who seemed to enjoy and remember all the details of her literary experiences. In her essay "Accidental Poetry" she describes in great detail how she learned all the aspects of writing. She tells about how she learned more from the world around her and her relatives than she learned in school. Things like alliteration, hyperbole, and rhythm were learned through practical experience. While I never knew what many of these fundamentals were called, I believe that I learned many of them in the same way that she did. These fundamentals were simple; if I was asked to write anything more complex, I would freeze up. I couldn't do it; there was a voice telling me that no matter what I wrote, it would sound foolish. Like Gail Godwin, I had a Watcher. Gail describes

in her essay, "The Watcher at the Gates", how she has a voice, a Watcher, which makes it harder for her to write. Her Watcher is a harsh critic that causes her to check all her facts before writing something that might not be true. My Watcher is more monstrous; he is abusive in his mocking of my creativity. It wasn't until recently, in my English 100 class, that I learned how to silence my Watcher. Before, my Watcher ruled over me and prevented me from enjoying writing. Now that I have broken free from my Watcher, I am more confident in my writing. A confidence that will help me as I continue my literary journey, I have learned how to keep the Watcher at bay. I can relate to both Case and Godwin in different ways; writing for me is both a frustrating and immensely satisfying process that has changed the way I express my ideas.

I remember second guessing myself in school whenever I had to write something. I never really liked writing, not because I was incapable of it, but because I believed that I was incapable of it. I dreaded writing assignments in English class. Whenever my teacher would assign an essay, I would cringe and put it off for as long as possible, or just not do it at all. I'm not certain when the voice in my head started convincing me that I was not good at writing. Whenever I did attempt to write something, I would find myself frantically scratching out what I had just written or wadding up the paper and throwing it away in frustration. After reading Godwin, I had a

name for this voice: “a Watcher at the Gates” (Godwin 291). Godwin is describing an internal conversation that happens to many people when they write. All of our self-doubts manifest as a critic that acts as a guard to the gates to our creativity and imagination. She explains that, “It is amazing the lengths a Watcher will go to keep you from pursuing the flow of your imagination” (Godwin 291). The form of Watcher that Godwin describes seems harmless, suggesting that pencils might not be sharp enough or that facts aren’t just right in a sentence. My Watcher is different. He is more like a monster guarding the gates to my imagination. Anytime I tried writing he would laugh at me and mock my efforts.

I don’t remember when this monster first appeared, in my earliest memories he wasn’t there. I was much like any other child learning my ABCs, and nursery rhymes. Like Chase, “I had become proficient in ‘Twinkle, Twinkle,’ as well as many other fine literary compositions” (Case 27). Case describes how significant all of these childhood memories were to her. She can describe them in great detail and explain the lesson she learned from each one. I don’t believe these things were as significant to me. I learned them as any other child does but they held no greater meaning than the immediate enjoyment I got from reciting them. Looking back at those times now, I realize that they were an important part of learning the fundamentals of English. I even remember

chanting on the playground as Case did, “Cinderella, dressed in yellow/went upstairs to kiss a fellow./Made a mistake and kissed a snake./How many doctors did it take?” (Case 27). These were just childhood games, though, and nothing more. The Watcher paid no attention to them. It wasn’t until I had my first writing assignment in school that I met him. We had been writing poetry in my Junior High School English class. We started fairly simply with rhyming poems. These were not so bad; they reminded me of the playground chants from my early childhood. I still didn’t think that I was very good at them; it seemed that the other children in the class always had more clever rhymes than mine were. When we moved to more advanced poems, I really started to feel uncomfortable. I remember when we were learning about Haiku; I was so frustrated. I couldn’t think of the right words to make the pattern fit. Every time I tried to think, my Watcher would be there holding the right words but not letting me have them. When he laughed it felt like the whole room would laugh. Each time one of the other children came up with a good poem, I would become more frustrated, until I finally gave up. The next time I had to write I found that my frustration hadn’t gone away. The frustration soon turned into hopelessness which caused me to doubt my abilities. Soon I just stopped trying to write; I knew that I would fail. This is a pattern that would repeat itself throughout my schooling until I finally dropped out at

seventeen.

When I started college, I knew that I would have to do something to silence my Watcher. Godwin suggests to, "Look for situations when he's likely to be off guard. Write too fast for him in an unexpected place, at an unexpected time" (Godwin 291). The key to Godwin's advice is to break away from your normal routine so that the Watcher is caught off guard. When I had to write my first paper in my English 100 class, I was a nervous wreck. I knew that my Watcher would prevent me from writing a good paper. It wasn't until I sat down with my good friend Jason and he told me that we were just going to talk about what the paper was going to be about that I came up with a way to trick my Watcher. We sat down to write my paper and Jason looked at me and said, "Let's just talk about what you want to put in your paper". This made my Watcher say, "Oh you're just going to talk?" I found that only then that I was able to sneak the right words past him and through the gate. Once the words were out the Watcher had no more power. I found that when we were done talking, I could write my paper. By the time I got to my second paper I wasn't sure what to talk about so Jason showed me another way to trick my Watcher. He showed me how to outline my paper. My Watcher was not prepared for this so I was able to type the words without him even realizing that I was writing my paper. Again once I had the words past the gates the Watcher was silenced and I could put them in my essay.

Now that I've figured out how to trick my watcher, I know that I'll be able to write with more confidence. Coming to terms with my Watcher has allowed me to grow as a writer. Godwin explains how she got to know her Watcher better:

On a very bad day I once wrote my Watcher a letter. "Dear Watcher," I wrote, "What is it you're so afraid I'll do?" Then I held his pen for him, and he replied instantly with a candor that has kept me from truly despising him. "Fail," he wrote back. (Godwin 292)

Godwin is explaining how her watcher is actually a good-natured part of herself that wants her to succeed. It is a part of her that desires perfection in what she writes and will settle for nothing less. While I don't believe that there is a part of me that is so self-destructive that it wants me to fail, sometimes it feels that way. I think that I'll always have to outsmart myself when writing papers in the future; whether they are for my remaining college courses or something that I will have to write for work someday.

There is a part of me that gets great satisfaction from writing a good paper. Each good grade I get is another victory over the watcher that has tormented me my whole life. When I was younger my watcher terrorized me and convinced me that I couldn't write. Now I have learned how to release his hold over me, he is powerless. As Case would say, "If I were a book, you could flip from front to back and see all the

stages I've been through in my writing journey" (Case 28). Sometimes I feel like that journey has just begun, maybe it's because for the first time I find that I actually enjoy writing. I still don't enjoy the process of writing and I feel like I still need to sneak by my Watcher. Maybe someday he'll realize that there is nothing that he can do to stop me from writing and will leave me alone so that I can continue my literary journey in peace.

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My Educational Hypocrisy

Angie Patterson



Ask anyone walking down the street if education is important and they will always tell you that it is. However, if education is so important to Americans then why do we consistently place below other nation in all subjects? Benjamin Barber explores this in his article “America Skips School.” The article details a cycle that seems to endlessly repeat in America. When there is a perceived crisis in our education system we are outraged. We wonder how it can happen when we place education in such high regard. Then after we have applied the latest solution, education seems to fade into the background again until the next crisis. I agree that our educational system is broken, we all know what needs to be done to fix it but we still don’t do what is necessary. I think that the problem is not as extensive as people might think. For me the problem was a cycle that started at home. My parents never did anything with education, so I never did and I think that my children began to see this. I don’t want this

cycle to continue so I am going to do things differently with my kids in order to show them that they do not have to be part of a cycle that has haunted my family for generations.

Barber writes about how Americans say that they care about education but don’t really place any importance on it in their daily lives. He says, “Americans do not really care about education – the country has grown comfortable with the game of ‘let’s pretend we care’” (229). I think that what Barber is trying to say here is that we have a tendency to say one thing and do another when it comes to education. This is exactly what I saw growing up. I watched my parents struggle for years. After paying the bills, they never seemed to have enough money for anything else. They didn’t want me to have the problems that they did, so they always told me that I needed to finish school and go onto college. Of course, I never took them seriously. I thought that if education was so important to them, then why hadn’t they done something with it? It was this mindset that made me never take education seriously. I dropped out of high school when I was seventeen years old. I didn’t feel like being there anymore because I had been held back a couple of times. I was only in the tenth grade and I was surrounded by students who were two years younger than me. I felt out of place and didn’t think I needed to be there anymore; many of my friends had already moved on and started their lives. They didn’t seem to need an

education so I felt that I didn't need one either. My parents never taught me how important education was so I decided to drop out and start my adult life instead of finishing school.

What I didn't realize, at the time, was that I was perpetuating the cycle that my parents had perpetuated before me. When I worked up the courage to tell my parents "I'm moving out", they were not happy. Once again they told me that I needed to stay in school and that they didn't want me to struggle. They had been down this road before me and made the same bad decisions. I felt they were hypocrites and I decided that it didn't matter what they thought. I was grown now and I could do whatever I wanted. Barber talks about how this same thing is happening across America:

Our children's illiteracy is merely our own, which they assume with commendable prowess. They know what we have taught them all too well: there is nothing in Virginia Woolf, in Shakespeare or Toni Morrison, that will advantage them in climbing to the top of the American heap. Academic credentials may still count, but schooling in and of itself is for losers. (233)

Barber echoes many of my thoughts from that time. I didn't need school to succeed; I would never use half of the things they taught me in the real world. This was why I moved out and got a place with a friend. I

found a job at a fast food restaurant, making minimum wage. Life was going great; I didn't need an education to have a good life. I was out on my own, living with friends and having fun. Then the bills started coming in and things got a little complicated. At first my friends and I thought that it wasn't a big deal to wait to pay our bills until the following week. Then before we knew it, two months had gone by and the bill still hadn't been paid. My paycheck was no longer big enough to cover the bill, so to escape I moved in with another friend. I struggled like this for many years and was finally forced to move back in with my parents. I lived with my parents for a few more years until after I had my first child. I tried being on my own again. Before I knew it I was a single mom with three children and struggling to make ends meet. Now I understood what my parents had been trying to tell me. I wished that I had finished school when I had the chance. I felt like I was trapped in a cycle that I would never be able to break out of.

After having kids, I realized that I was now living the cycle. I was a high school dropout, unemployed and living off of food stamps and child support. I was telling my children that education was important but I hadn't done anything to show them why it was important. I realized that I was doing the same thing to my children that my parents had done to me. I found myself preaching the same things that my parents had preached. Barber makes a good point when he says, "Are our kids stupid for

ignoring what we preach and copying what we practice?" (230). Barber means that our children are smarter than what we give them credit for; they realize that the things we do are more important than the things we say when it comes to education. This is very true, as the old saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words." I began to question myself. Was I stupid for ignoring my own parent's teachings instead of merely copying their actions? I wondered about my own children. When I looked at them I saw the same look in their eyes that I had seen in my own while looking in the mirror several years earlier. My lack of education was coloring my children's view on school. I wondered if they would pass the same values, or lack of values, on to their own children someday. I thought about how long this cycle had been turning and how long it would continue to turn if no one did something to stop it. I realized that if they were going to copy my actions, then I would need to set a better example for them. I didn't want them falling into the same trap that I had.

I didn't want them thinking the same things that I had about my parents; that I was a hypocrite. So I determined that I would go back to school and not only finish but do something with my education. In the first part of his article Barber asks an interesting question, "If Americans over a broad political spectrum regard education as vital, why has nothing been done?" (229). Barber makes a good point, people from all walks of life see education as one

of the most important issues facing our nation. He wonders why, if we know how important it is, we haven't done anything to fix it. I think that nothing has been done because we are looking at the problem from the wrong angle. I agree with Barber that the root of the problem is that we need to place more importance on education so that our children see the value in it. However, I think that the problem has to be solved at home first. I am going to end the vicious cycle for my family. I have my GED and now I'm in college. I am going to show my children how different life can be if you get a good education. I want my life to be different; I don't want to have to depend on food stamps or anyone else to survive. I want my children to grow up and follow the example I am setting now. I don't want my grandchildren to even know what food stamps are. My children know how we have struggled over the past few years, so when I graduate and start working they will see what sort of life an education can give them. I want to make an impression on them so that they don't make the same mistakes that I did. I will not rely on hollow words like my parents did, and their parents probably did before them. I will be doing something that I love and I hope my children see how rewarding an education can be. I know that the steps I am taking now are not very big in the grand scheme of things. They will do nothing to solve the nation's current educational crisis. But it is the small steps that need to be taken. If each and every family really took education

seriously and did something about it then we would see a real change. Teachers being underpaid and classroom sizes are just symptoms of the real problem. Attitudes have to change, and that cannot be accomplished by talking about what is wrong. Our children are too smart for that. We must show them the way.

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Reading & Me

Bailey Clutter



For me, reading was never really easy. I never wanted to sit down and read. I was always outside as a child. Playing outside was more fun than sitting down with a book. Reading was not something I was interested in and it didn't bother me when I was always in the lowest reading group. Around seventh grade, I started to want to read just like Richard Rodriguez did as described in "The Lonely, Good Company of Books." In the essay, he goes into detail about how he began to read and why he wanted to read. I too finally understood how enjoyable a book could really be and how many places each book could take me. Our experiences are similar because we were both affected by the endings of books and the power the author had over the characters. We also both felt like we were living through the books we read, each one taking its reader to a different place in the world or a completely different time period. My experience with reading, much like Rodriguez's in "The Lonely, Good Company

of Books," let me experience life in various ways through every single book I read.

As I started to read, certain books grabbed my attention and I found myself reading those books over and over. One of these books was *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. I was drawn to the series because the characters were able to do something I would never be allowed to do. They were able to travel around the world over the summer as teenagers. Rodriguez says,

I loved the feeling I got of being at home in a fictional world, where I knew the names of the characters and cared about what was going to happen to them. And it bothered me that I was forced away at the conclusion, when fiction closed tight, like a fortune teller's fist – the futures of all the major characters neatly resolved (296).

When he says this, he means that he loved reading and finding out what happened to the characters, but it concerned him when the story ended and the characters' lives were put back together. I also felt this way about *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* books. I didn't want the books to end because their lives fascinated me so much. All of the characters were off doing something completely different from the next. Lena was in Greece for the summer spending time with her grandparents and falling in love with Kostos. Bridget was at a soccer camp in California. Tibby is working for the summer and becomes friends with a

12 year old girl with leukemia and Carmen is with her father in South Carolina, for the summer. Each character had their own chaos of being away from their family and friends and any other problem that came their way. Also I wanted the characters' lives' to be fixed, but I was always upset when I got to the end and the story was over forever. All of the problems were fixed and I was happy that the characters had figured everything out, but I also wanted to keep living their lives' along with them. I wanted to keep going back and forth between the characters. One minute I was seeing the beauty of Greece, then the next I was on the beach in California. It did not seem right to me that the story could end so fast.

Another book I connected with and read many times was *Family Tree* by Katherine Ayres. In the book, the main character, eleven-year-old Tyler Stoudt is assigned a family tree project for school and is forced to discover her dad's side of the family in order to complete the project. Her mother died when giving birth to her so her father is left with no other choice than to reconnect himself and his daughter with his long lost family. Richard Rodriguez says, "What gives a book its value was some major idea or theme it contained" (295). By this, he is stating that we connect to books by their main topic. I was drawn to this book because I also didn't know very much about my dad's side of the family. I've only ever known my grandma, aunt, and cousins. So while I read the words on every page

that described the details of her finding her grandfather, I connect with it because I didn't know whom my grandfather was. Through reading the book I experienced what it would actually feel like to finally meet my grandfather after all the years of knowing nothing about him. Also, knowing my grandfather on my mother's side had died when I was baby left me made me want to search for the one that could still be alive. After finding that connection with the book because of the main theme, it helped led me back to reading it many times. Every time I went back to reread that book I was fulfilling a little part of my life I knew I would probably never really get to experience.

The *Twilight Saga* is another set of books that let me experience living through characters. I connected with the books in a way I never thought possible. I connected with them because the main characters, Bella and Edward, find eternal love. Rodriguez says, "Despite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books" (296). He means that even though he was reluctant to read at first, he eventually started to enjoy reading. I also felt like this when reading these books at first. I didn't realize a love story about vampires and werewolves could interest me as much as it did. I was also drawn to The *Vampire Academy* series for the same reasons. The vampires in each book are completely different, but with the hidden love story behind the main plot in The

Vampire Academy, books I caught myself hoping they would stay together forever. I never thought I would feel this way about a book but the feeling made me want to continue reading and to keep reading the books over and over. This feeling was so important to me because it told me that I could read any book, not just one I thought I would be interested in.

Reading was never really easy for me. This is similar to Richard Rodriguez story of how he started to read, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books. He read lots of books but he read them because he felt like he was supposed to be reading, not because he wanted to read them. Although, he felt this way he still found himself enjoying the books he read. I also feel this way sometimes. I can force myself to read something and even enjoy it. Sometimes even now I find myself not having an interest in reading sometimes. I will never forget the days when I would pick up a book and read for hours until I reached the end. And I may never sit on the beaches of California or see the beautiful landscapes of Greece. I won't ever meet my grandfather or fall in love with a vampire but I will always remember how much those characters influenced my life. I will always remember the times when I lived through those books and how much fun it truly was to do so. I hope one day I will have time to sit down and enjoy the company of a good book. I'll pick up that book and open to the first page. I'll read the words and begin living through another set of characters.

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There and back again, a misfit's tale

Andrea Brown



Insolent, hateful, unruly. These are words used by my juvenile officer as he stood in front of the judge. I had no structure, or responsibility. I lived life as I wanted with no regard for my education or my future. That is, until I was ordered by the juvenile court to be remanded into state custody. That's the day I was thrust into a world saturated with exercise, rules, discipline, and consequences. It was during that time that the B.C.A changed my life.

The B.C.A stands for Buchanan County Academy. Although, I find it more fitting to stand for Bad Children's Academy. The facility is a live in military based institution where all my basic needs were met. A type of reform school and reform is what they do best.

I can still recall my first day. As I approached the big brick building, the dried autumn leaves crackled under my footsteps. I was scared and unsure of what awaited me. I wanted to call my mom and promise her if she would just give me

another chance I would go to school and change my attitude. I wanted to abscond from the unknown that was behind the big doors. As my first foot entered the building a sergeant with shiny boots and a freshly pressed uniform started screaming in my face. I could see small particles of saliva leave his mouth as he yelled "look forward, stand up straight." His tone was authoritative and urgent. I couldn't hold a complete thought when I was being screamed at. The tears itched my cheeks as they ran down my flushed face. My throat went dry and I felt like I needed to gag. As my nose ran, I reached up to wipe it on my sleeve. "I didn't tell you to move, did I? Drop and give me 60!" the sergeant yelled, ordering me to do pushups.

My arms shook. My muscles could take no more, and I still had 25 more pushups to go. 25 doesn't sound like a big number, but I can't ever recall doing pushups before that day. 25 might as well been 2000, I sobbed. I could hear marching. I looked up threw my bloodshot teary eyes to see a group marching in unison. Another voice called out, "Halt!" the group stopped. The sergeant said to the group, "You guys have a new member to your platoon, and she isn't following instructions. As a team you will all do pushups until she is finished." My face burned. I was mad and embarrassed. There were 10 mean Missouri misfits glaring at me with each pushup they had to do. Up until that point I was selfish but I learned very quickly that my actions would affect everyone around me.

That first day stands out in my mind vividly, but as it turns out, that was only the beginning. Our beds had to be crisp, sharp, and free of wrinkles. The corners were to be hospital corners, folded and tucked to perfection. One time I didn't make my bed to their precise specs. My bed was swiftly stripped, and I was handed a toothbrush. Did I have bad breath, I thought to myself. Oh no, they directed me outside towards the facilities dumpster, and I was instructed to scrub it. "Are you kidding me?" I asked. The mere question got me 30 pushups. It smelled like old milk. That smell was one of many, as I scrubbed some new ones surfaced. The BCA had a whole arsenal of exercises. Any one of them would send the toughest, meanest and callused of criminals limping and weeping back into marching formation. So, on that day, I felt lucky to have only been given a cleaning duty.

In English class we all had to pick a book to read. When the book was completed we took a computerized test on how well we understood it. The whole platoon passing their test by Friday morning meant the difference between earning a trip home for the weekend, and staying at the BCA. The book I picked on this particular instance was as dry as stale toast. It wasn't interesting nor did it hold my attention. Bla Bla Bla is all I remembered of a page after I read it. I had to make a decision, keep going on the book, take the test at the end, and probably fail it, because after a couple hundred pages it was a fight to stay awake. Or, I could abandon the 3 days I spent trying

to read it and choose another one. I had to pick a different book, but time was running out. I only had 2 more days! I read day and night, every free chance I got. The rest of the platoon passed their test already. The only thing holding us up from a much needed weekend spent with our families rested on me passing.

Growing up I was never a big reader, and it doesn't make me feel proud to say that I never remember reading a book before I went to BCA. However, now it was test time. I quickly glanced around the room only to find 10 faces peering at me. Their expressions were easy to read. They were excited, yet uneasy. I did not want to be the only reason they didn't get to go home. The test was 12 questions. My mouth was parched. My palms were perspiring and unsteady, so much that I was nervous my trembling fingers would mistakenly hit the wrong buttons. After each question I checked my answer twice. At the end the screen read "Congratulations you have successfully answered 12 out of 12 questions." What? I passed?" I thought to myself. I felt accomplished. I looked up to see my platoon anxiously waiting. My expression must have been unreadable. The English teacher came over and said with a smile "very good score Private Watkins." I saw the 10 members of my platoon breathe a delighted sigh of relief almost in cadence. It was in that moment that I earned the respect of my peers.

Home seemed like such a different

place that it used to be. Mentally it was chaotic and disorderly. Things that used to be normal now felt odd and foreign and stuff I never noticed before was then seen in high definition. The white lace curtains were stained with yellow from nicotine. Dust filled nic nacs lined the walls in a hosh posh array. Everyone talked deafeningly and out of turn, even interrupting one another. Several times I caught myself before asking "permission to speak freely?" or "May I use the restroom?" I could see the surprise spill across my mom's face when I went to bed at my scheduled 9:00 pm, and then I woke up at 6 am and promptly made my bed, deciding that rather than spending 2 days feeling ill at ease that everything was untidy, I would just clean it myself. Being reformed seems like such an adolescent way of referring to my transformation. I was being reprogrammed!

I spent 8 months in BCA. During that time I learned that you must give respect in order to receive it. They taught me that every action has a consequence. Whether it was getting an excellent score on a reading test or halfheartedly making your bed, nothing was without praise or reprimand. Through that experience I developed a love for reading. I finally understood the meaning of the saying "hard work pays off." Lastly, I learned respect for authority. BCA not only reformed the path I was taking but influenced how I parent my children as well. They were guided from toddlers to have respect, to follow rules, and to work as a

team. In return they are shown praise and reward.

Under the School Bus

Andrea Brown



Education is a sore subject in the United States as we are falling behind other super powers. We as a country have a need to figure out why we are failing and how to fix our shortcomings. Some might say that the teachers are to blame for not failing students. Others might argue that there is too much emphasis on testing and that is to blame. The education or lack thereof in America is a serious problem. In this essay I will provide a strong opinion on education by supported works of literature, "In Praise of the F word" by Mary Sherry, "The Big Score" by Daniel McGinn, and "America Skips School" by Benjamin R. Barber. Like in "A Nation Still at Risk" by Chester E. Finn, Jr., I propose that maybe it's not a one sided issue. A multitude of changes will be necessary to bring the United States back up to par with the top educated countries in the world.

I find it sickening and pathetic that children are lead like mindless cattle through school rather than working hard and turning the cogs of the education for themselves. I don't believe that leaving a child behind is a bad thing. I cannot see the

good in passing children who are not mastery or even familiar with the material. The children of today are more concerned with texting their friends or posting what they had for lunch on Facebook than what grades are going to get them into a reputable college. In which case if that child falls behind than it's my opinion he or she or she should be made to repeat the current grade. Short shorts in high school surely warrant more attention than the math lessons on the chalk board. Images of barely dressed girls and sexy boys are the role models that our kids have. School has become less and less about education and more like a singles bar. To many students education is merely secondary to their fast texting thumbs. In the essay "A nation Still at Risk" Chester E. Finn, Jr. talks about students not being up to par academically and says "Just 5 Percent of seventeen-year old high-school students can read well enough to understand and use technical materials, literarily essays, and historical documents." (pg. 243) So why should the students who use school as just another internet hotspot be allowed to move forward? Failing students would ensure that teachers aren't just standing up in front of the class giving a soundtrack to flirting teens and posturing athletes but really getting through to the student body, that if you don't make school a priority you will not pass.

In the essay "In praise of the F word" Mary Sherry talks about a meeting with Mrs. Stifter, her son's English teacher.

"He sits in the back of the room talking to his friends", the teacher said. Mary Sherry asked the teacher, "Why don't you move him to the front row?" and Stifter said "I don't move seniors". "I flunk them." Sherry went home and spoke with her son and said "She's going to flunk you. Suddenly English became a priority in his life. He finished the semester with an A." That student had a wake-up call and comprehended the gravity and severity of the situation and made his English studies a priority. Americans have gotten indolent in many aspects of our lives including that of education. So is it any surprise that our kids have chosen to take the easy road down learning's path? We pass students who don't make the grade; we give them specialized curriculum better suited for their short-comings. How do we know who should pass and who should be failed?

I now come to my next point. Children need to be tested. I am not a fan of standardized test as I see draw backs for students as well as teachers. However, I do believe that comprehension tests should be mandatory. A student that day dreams through class should be made to take a quarterly test that proves learning retention and ability to learn the given material. If they don't pass than teachers should FAIL them. A quarterly test might be hard for younger students, as they learn by repetition. However, it is my opinion that quarterly test would truly show results in the classroom. Some might argue that there is already too much testing in schools.

Daniel McGinn author of "The Big Score" quotes Alfie Kohn author of "The Schools Children Deserve" as saying, "Every hour that teachers feel compelled to try to raise test scores is an hour not helping kids become critical, creative, curious thinkers." (pg. 262) I agree that teaching to the test is not an acceptable way to educate. However, I do believe that students must be tested to see what they know and what they don't know at the end of every quarter. What the student lacks based on test scores they should be tutored.

We have gotten to be a soft nation when dealing with our youth. We have excused not paying attention and disrespect to educators. Students know they will receive little to no punishment. I see instances where schools have used checks and minuses, or even number grades so as not to offend the child's pride. In the essay "America skips school" Benjamin Barber says "Our kids spend 900 hours a year at school (the ones that go to school) and from 1,200 to 1,800 hours a year in front of the television set." (pg. 230) That lends credence to my point that not even parents take education seriously. With that many hours in front of a TV, where are children more likely to learn?

I believe we need to wake up our youth. We need to test them and if they fail then FLUNK them and hold them accountable for their actions. Educations bar will not be raises to that of the smarter countries until children begin to learn that

education is and always should be priority one. I believe we can do better by being stricter, harder and more diligent in the teaching and testing of today's youth. This will not fix every aspect of our education dilemma but I feel it's a good start.

MY GRANDPARENT'S GIFTS

Talia Allen



How well do you know your grandparents? Unfortunately for me I did not get to know my grandparents very well. I can only describe what they looked like based on the pictures I have seen. I have a few memories that I had with my grandparents, but that is solely because at the time of the memories I received a possession that reminds me of them. I received a pin, a cook book, and a wooden stick horse. All of these items have significant value to me. But these items will probably get thrown away when I pass and cannot keep them any longer. My heirlooms make me the imaginative, hopeful, and curious person that I am.

I was just a little girl, maybe only five years old and spending the weekend at my Grandmother Allen's house. My grandmother always let me play dress up in her old clothes from when she was younger. She had bright, colorful skirts and shirts; some with floral designs, some with

stripes, some plaid, and some that were just plain. I would get all dressed up and pretend to play teacher with about eight teddy bears. Among these teddy bears there was a small, soft, black teddy bear with a brown belly and a red ribbon tied around its neck. That small black bear was always my "star student." One day as I was playing with my bears my grandmother pulled me aside and said, "Talia, why do you enjoy playing with that little black bear so much?" I did not know how to respond. It was just a bear nothing special, or fancy. I shrugged my shoulders and said, "I don't know." She replied with, "hmm" and reached into her blue pouch with yellow daisies on it that was tied to her walker and pulled out a small pin. She grabbed me by the hand, pulled me in close to her and said, "I want you to have this." I recognized the pin as something familiar. Then I remembered that she always wore that pin every Sunday to church for as long as I could remember. The pin was a hard tiny version of the teddy bear that I loved. It was shiny but had some dull spots from where she had worn it up against the collar of her blouse, I was thrilled to have the pin and I took it everywhere with me. Two years later when my grandmother was in the hospital spending her last few days with us she grabbed my hand and pulled me in close, like she had done two years before, and asked the question, "do you still have my pin?" I pulled the pin out of the pocket of my jeans. My grandmother held me tight and said, "Hold this pin close to your heart

when you are feeling down and I will be there to help you through it, everything will be alright.” That statement would be the last statement that my grandmother would say to me. Every time life gets rough or I am feeling down I hold that pin clasped tightly in my fist and I can feel a sense of relief run through my body, as if she was truly there to help me through my hardships.

Every Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter my mother and I would leave home early in the morning, and venture to Horton, Kansas to my grandmother Holsman’s home. The three of us would spend the morning hours reading and preparing recipes from an old cook book that my grandmother had made herself. The cook book was a black and white composition notebook, full of recipes that she had been taught by her mother, recipes that friends gave her that she enjoyed, and just simple recipes off of the back of food wrappers. All of the food that we would prepare from the cook book was sweet, salty, and just simply divine. After spending several joyful hours preparing dinner with my mom and grandmother the rest of the family would come eat our food and celebrate the holidays. However, my mother always had my grandmother’s cook book in her possession. It always sat in our china cabinet in our dining room. Nevertheless, a few years after my grandmother passed away and I had moved into my own apartment, my mother brought me a house warming gift. Wrapped in blue, crisp wrapping paper with a large

shiny silver bow was my grandmother’s cookbook. As I unwrapped the book I noticed all the age and stains that the book had obtained over the years. The pages that had once been white were now yellowing with age and the sides of the book were worn to the nub. Also, you could see where we had been measuring ingredients over the open pages of the book. It now sits in the kitchen in plain view for everyone walking by to see. To them it just looks like a rotten old composition note book, but to me it is a book filled with the memories of my grandmother. Every Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter is now spent at my mother’s house with my mother, my kids, and I preparing dishes out of the old cookbook.

Galloping around on horse sticks playing cowgirls with my sister is one of my favorite memories. We would run around on our horse sticks chasing each other and herding the dog like she was a herd of sheep yelling, “yaw-yaw” and “giddy-up.” Our horse sticks were also good for reaching the sweet snacks that our parents hid on the top of the fridge in the kitchen. I have had my horse stick as long as I could remember. On my tenth birthday my father handed me an old letter that was sealed in an envelope, the letter was from my Grandfather who had passed away less than two weeks before I was born. The letter read:

My dearest granddaughter Talia!

I have been patiently awaiting the day of your arrival into this crazy, backwards world. I have tightened and refinished your dad's old baby bed just for you, but I know you're going to be a very special girl. Therefore, I also made you and your sister your very own matching horse sticks. I told your dad not to give you this letter until you were old enough to understand, but I am fairly certain that you have passed away long before you got to read this. I just thought you should know how much I love you and how special you and your sister are to me and your grandmother. I hope that one day you will be blessed with children or possibly even grandchildren that can enjoy these horse sticks as much as you and your sister hopefully have. With much love comes great happiness. I love you girls with all of my heart.

Love,

Grandpa Allen

I still have the matching horse sticks in hopes that my two sons can soon play with them and endure exciting new adventures like my sister and I did. These horse sticks remind me that, "with great love comes great happiness," because after all they were made with the unconditional love from my grandfather.

In conclusion, my grandparents created some of my most significant memories. Not only my grandparents but the items they gave me to remember them

by and the traditions that I will get to pass down to my children. I do not know where my bear pin, my cookbook, or my horse sticks will go after I pass away. Although I am hopeful that one of my children will understand the importance of these items and traditions and will pass them along to their future children. But no one will truly know until that time comes.

My Literacy History

Dedrick Skinner



Today reading is not a popular hobby among many people. Many people wouldn't read a book for entertainment. Many people wouldn't read for knowledgeable purposes either. Reading is underrated in today's society. Many people do not understand the importance of reading and how crucial it is in life. In the essay, "One Writer's Beginnings" by Eudora Welty, she talks about how she fell in love with books. In the essay, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books" by Richard Rodriguez, he explains how he did not know why reading was so important, but as he grew older he understood its values. Like Welty, I also developed a love for books at young age, but as I grew up I felt reading was a burden because I didn't understand its values like Rodriguez. Now at the college level I have a new love for reading because I understand its importance and how it expands education and imagination. I can relate to Welty and Rodriguez's literacy experiences because I have learned to love reading and understand its values.

I began learning how to read at the age of 2 or 3 my mother would constantly sound out letters of words for me until I learned them, but I didn't develop a love for reading until pre-school. I can remember teachers reading to the class with dramatic emotions, expressing character thoughts through different voices and actions, drawing mental images in our young imaginations. Like Rodriguez at a young age, to me it seemed like teachers made books come to life. Rodriguez says, "Playfully she ran through complex sentences, calling the words alive with her voice, making it seem that the author somehow was speaking directly to me" (294). This excited me about reading, I wanted to read more, and I began to enjoy learning how to read even more. Like Welty as my reading abilities developed I wanted my mother to read to me all the time. Welty says, "I must have given her no peace" (298). I wanted my mother to read everything to me like books, newspapers, cereal boxes, and anything else with words. When I started reading books on my own I read many Dr. Seuss and Berenstain Bears books. My favorite Dr. Seuss book was "Cat in the Hat" and my favorite Berenstain Bears book was "Bears in the Night" by Stan and Jan Berenstain. Throughout elementary school I was always one of the top readers in my classes. In each grade I would be reading above my grade level, and I would win awards each year for a certain amount of books I read. Welty says, "I cannot remember a time when I was not in love with them" (298), as she expressed her love

for books. I shared this same love for book from pre-school until about the fifth grade.

In middle school reading became harder, the books were bigger and more complex. I was introduced to long chapter books which took me days to read, compared to the simple elementary books which took a couple hours. I had tests and book reports, so comprehension of books was very important at this point. My reading skills had developed more, and I was very good at comprehending books. I was also still one of the top readers in my classes and like Rodriguez teachers admired me. Rodriguez quotes his teacher, "I only wish the rest of you took reading as seriously as Richard obviously does" (295). Also like Rodriguez teachers would compare other students to me giving me praise for me reading efforts. I was such a good reader I could read a book once and explain everything in it from front to back. Even in middle school I would still win awards for reading many books. I wouldn't read for fun, but instead for the rewards or because it was required for work. I was a good reader, but my love for it continued to fade as I entered high school. Reading became more complex each grade level and it was required more for homework and class work, it became dull. My love for it faded because I became lazy.

In high school I completely disliked reading. Rodriguez says "Reading was at best, only a chore" (294), and that was exactly how I felt. Reading became boring

to me, and I became irritated when teachers would assign reading assignments. I would never completely read books, but instead skim through them to find main ideas or things that might be important. My laziness for reading started to hinder my grades. Teachers would encourage me to read more, but I wasn't motivated at all. I did not come from a household where reading habits were greatly encouraged. When I was a child my mother explained that learning how to read was important, but good reading habits were not installed in me. Unlike Welty, my household did not have much reading material and reading was not a hobby. Welty says, "Besides the bookcase in the living room, which was called "the library," there were the encyclopedia tables and dictionary stand under windows in our dining room" (299). My house was the exact opposite. We rarely brought books home. My house was more like Rodriguez's household where reading was mostly done for work. Rodriguez says, "Both of my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible" (293). My mother would read the Bible, bills, and recipes online, but reading books was not one of her hobbies.

I continued to slide through high school by just skimming instead of reading, but it still hindered my grades. It wasn't until second semester of my senior year in high school when I realized reading was crucial in life. My counselor, Mr. Stevens, saw that my grades were slipping and

scheduled a meeting for me one afternoon. In this meeting I sat down with Mr. Stevens and I explained to him how I thought reading was boring and a burden. He understood my point of view, but began to explain how reading could broaden my imagination and was essential for gaining knowledge. He explained to how reading was required in college and that I could not be successful in college or even in a career if I did not read. Mr. Stevens told me if I wanted to go to college I would have to change my lazy habits, so he challenged me to read more and see for myself what a difference reading more would make in my life. Inspired by Mr. Stevens' lecture, I decided to take his challenge. Like Rodriguez I want to read back that would educate me and prepare me for college. Rodriguez would say to his teachers, "Give me the names of important books" (295). I would also ask teachers and librarians what materials they would recommend me to read to prepare for college. I knew a short time of reading these materials wouldn't completely prepare me for college, but would at least break my lazy habits. Three months of this good reading habit and I began to see a difference in my grades. I continued this reading habit through the rest of the school year and throughout the summer. I noticed my thinking skills began to improve. Rodriguez says, "Didn't I realize that reading would open up whole new worlds" (294). This was true, I felt like my thoughts were more educated. Most importantly I knew I had changed my lazy

habits and I felt more educated about things I needed to know for college.

I loved the way reading made me feel educated and I realize the values of reading. I learned that reading not only helps a person develop a point of view, but improves thinking skills. Reading exercises the brain, improves concentration, and teaches people about the world around them. I also learned that reading improves vocabulary and helps in subjects like English and history. Reading is a good source of entertainment and I can relax the body and calm the mind. I now know reading is essential for a college and a career. Reading is the key to knowledge and without knowledge you cannot be successful in life. Now in college I have reading assignments almost every day, but now that I understand its values, I enjoy it and don't mind reading at all.

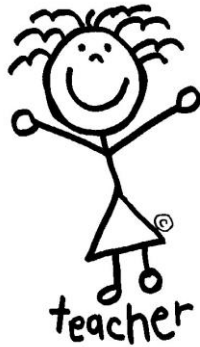
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A Superior Substitute

Ruth Weese



Saturday mornings with *Tom and Jerry* or *Popeye*. After school with *The Mickey Mouse Club* or *Gilligan's Island*. In the 1970's, America's past-time was not waking up on Saturday morning to read a book or rushing home from school to pick up a favorite book. In fact, a majority of parents have, at some point, used television as an electronic babysitter. If a child came home from school to an empty house and let themselves in with their own house-key, they would be known as a 'latch-key kid'; the television provided a sense of not being alone. Evenings in America meant anticipating the last episode of *Hawaii 5-0*, or feeling like you personally knew Radar from M*A*S*H. In many ways, my home was the exception to the rule when I was in grade school, but the absence of a television in our home was a difference that now, as an adult, I am thankful for. While I was one of those 'latch-key kids', my afternoons after school were spent with a good book. Evenings were often spent reading or lying in front of the record player

following along with a story book. Similar to Richard Rodriguez in, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," reading provided me a way of escape. My love of reading began at an early age, which led to a lifetime of reading for spiritual enrichment and pleasure, as well as making text books and job related materials easier to read.

Reading for spiritual enrichment is one of those things that I valued only after the passing of time. The first memory I have of being read to happened each morning before any of us four children were allowed to leave the house. It didn't matter if it was a weekday before school, or a weekend before heading out to play, we first sat at the table as a family while Mom and Dad read from the Bible and a devotional book. As a child, I certainly did not appreciate being rushed in the morning before school or being held up from play time.

However, like Rodriguez in, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," today I can truly say, "These books have made me all that I am" (Rodriguez 297). Rodriguez had been inspired by an English professor who had made a list of books that had a great impact on his life. Listening to the Bible being read each morning first taught me the benefits of beginning each day with a time of spiritual meditation. Realizing the importance of that time has followed me into my adult life, and I can truly say that the time I spend each morning reading the Bible and a study book has made me all that I am. There's something about a new study book that makes getting out of bed before

the sun even thinks about rising all worth it. Before I am finished with one book, I am looking for the next one with anticipation of what I will learn. I often tell people that I wouldn't make it through my day if I didn't first take this time. As a child I considered taking time to be read to each morning a bother, but as an adult reading on my own, I am very thankful for the spiritual growth it has brought me.

After the required reading each morning, and all homework was completed in the afternoon, it was my time to read for pleasure. Because we didn't have a television in our home when I was growing up, there wasn't an after school snack sitting in front of, "The Andy Griffith Show" or evenings with "Iron Sides." Reading books was a way of transporting me to a whole different world just as it did for Rodriquez when he said, "A book could open doors for me. It could introduce me to people and show me places I never imagined existed" (Rodriquez 294). Rodriquez was encouraged by the nun who was tutoring him that reading could open new worlds for him, which then led to his impressive reading program. For me, it began as a young child with books about Ramona by Beverly Cleary and progressed to young adult novels about nurses. One of my best memories is laying on the floor in front of the record player listening to, "The Big Bad Wolf" while following along with the book. Ethel Barrett would narrate, "David and Goliath" while I followed along. As I got older, I would literally read for

hours being transported into the romantic world of being a hospital nurse, which, by the way, is what I dreamed I would be when I grew up. Since the furthest we ever went for a vacation was a couple hours south to Branson or Portland, Oregon for church camp, reading took me to places I could only dream of. I may not have ever seen a castle with my own eyes, but Nancy Drew could take me there. Today, my favorite pleasure books are Christian fiction suspense novels. They hold just enough suspense to keep me interested, but not so much that I can't relax. I also have a collection of antique recipe books that I could spend hours with. I wish I had more time to read for pleasure, but just as when I was a child, I still read for pleasure at the end of every day to take my mind off of the many responsibilities and pressures of my life.

Because reading was a part of my life at such an early age, reading text books and job related materials has come easier to me than to some. While in school as a child, I excelled in spelling and vocabulary since I was already familiar with a wide range of words included in the curriculum. I loved the feel of a brand new text book, and just as with Rodriquez, "....books brought me academic success as I hoped they would" (296). By the time Rodriquez entered high school, he had developed such a skill for reading that his speaking and writing skills were also greatly impacted. As an adult student, most of my assignments incorporate reading. In fact,

a recent assignment to prepare a speech required me to do extensive research about lung cancer, which involved a great deal of reading. Just as with a textbook assignment, I have many opportunities for reading while on the job. I know that many of my co-workers consider reading a chore that they do not enjoy, and I have seen that reflected in their work with poor sentence structure, grammar and punctuation. Interestingly, one of the comments I frequently receive on performance reviews is my ability to write and speak professionally. One of the most enjoyable aspects of my job is the task of drafting letters, composing documents, or reading a regulatory document for content and structure. Reading a textbook, and the ability to appropriately edit a document or compose a professional sounding letter is a direct result of many years of reading.

I was one of the fortunate ones who had a positive literacy experience as a child. I often wonder what my experiences in life would have been like if I had not had a mother who encouraged me to read, or if we would have had a television. For those who haven't had a positive literacy experience, is there a substitute that doesn't make reading a pleasure or necessary to everyday life? In my children's generation, escaping to another world is as simple as a video game instead of a good mystery novel. The attention span required for focusing on a text book has been reduced by the fast moving pace of a game included with the latest cell phone release.

Many times I've heard a student say, "I don't need to read the book because I've seen the movie." Not having been to a movie theatre until I was out of my teen years, seeing the movie instead of reading the book was not my experience. I don't feel sorry for my experiences because they have had a profound effect on my life. Every day of my life has an aspect of reading to it, and to me there is no good substitute. Taking time to read each morning for spiritual enrichment allows me to start my day positively and without it, I would not be the person I am today. Reading may be a necessary part of my career, but I can attribute many successes as a result of being an avid reader. I've tried ending my day without a good book to relax with, but somehow trying to go to sleep with the television just doesn't work the same. Without a doubt, having a positive literacy experience that began as far back as I can remember has led to a lifetime of reading and will continue to be the source of spiritual growth, pleasure at the end of the day, as well as continued academic and career successes.

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A Restless Heart Settles Down

Ruth Weese



I was moving again! But, what was new about that? Growing up a preacher's kid, I had moved many times. Add the times I moved as a single young adult, as well as into my married life, and I could legitimately be considered a restless soul. As a matter of fact, there are many areas of my life where I become restless and desire change. I suppose I inherited that from my dad, who moved the living room furniture about as often as the seasons changed. However, one move in particular has had a lasting influence on the person I am today because it taught me the importance of having a place to call home.

I was too young to remember the first time I moved to a new state. At just one year of age and the youngest of four children, my family moved from Tacoma, Washington to Denver, Colorado for my dad's first pastoral assignment. At eight years of age, the second move came and, along with that, the first experience of leaving a sibling behind. That was the first move I distinctly remember and I believe to

be the beginning of the restless feeling that followed me for many years to come. The adjustment to another new school, and completely different climate was very scary. I had never before had to hide in a closet and wait for the tornado sirens to stop, while the crash of thunder caused boxes to fall off the shelves. This place certainly did not feel like home.

Through the years, there were many more moves; some exciting and good, and some very difficult, surrounded by grief. I went to more than a half-dozen schools and moved 2,000 miles away from my family the day after turning 19. I found myself continuing in the same pattern of moving that I had grown up with and that my parents continued. Toward the end of the six years on my own, I began to not only feel restless, but also experience a desire to mend relationships and find a sense of belonging somewhere. I needed a place to call home.

Some of my family still lived in Colorado so that is where I headed. I met my husband in Colorado. We married and had children fairly quickly and through the early years of our marriage, we moved several times. Once again, some of the moves were good and exciting, while others were difficult. One particular move to an apartment without air conditioning, partying neighbors, and an infestation of cockroaches was very difficult. We slowly progressed from apartment life to home owner and then to a better home. During

those years, I continued to work outside the home. I didn't always work full-time and sometimes I worked from home, but I certainly put any career objectives on hold. My parents had moved to the West Coast so there were no grandparents for the kids. We really did not enjoy the city life and living in the country in Colorado was well outside our economic reach. So we- well mainly I – decided it was time to move.

The next move was from Aurora, Colorado to Agency, Missouri. That move was good and exciting, as well as difficult. My husband grew up in Missouri and I had never even met his family before we married. But, I started to realize that I had a desire for my kids to have grandparents in their lives and for them to have a life that was different from mine. I wanted them to have a place to call home. If I've heard the question, "Where are you from?", or "Where did you grow up?" once, I've heard it a thousand times. I've never had an answer to that question because I don't have a place to call home. "I'm from everywhere", I say.

We went from the city life to the country life when we moved to Agency, Missouri. We had always enjoyed the outdoors and would frequently make trips to the Colorado Mountains to get out of the city, so being able to live in the country was great. I remember one day saying to my family that where we lived now was in a setting that we would have had to pay to visit when we lived in Colorado. We loved

the wildlife that frequently visited as close as our back deck. We found a church home and quickly became involved. But, our children were first and fourth graders in school and had a very difficult time adjusting to their new school. My husband's and my first jobs were very short lived and a severe disappointment. Although we loved the surrounding of our home, it seemed as though something was always wrong with the house and it was not all the house of our dreams. It seemed this was not a good move and about four years later that restless feeling was in full swing.

I was ready to move back to Colorado, but his time my husband said we weren't moving. I was going to have to find a way to make this work. If I wanted my children to have a place to call home, it was time for me to settle down. It took some time, but eventually there seemed to be a feeling of home settling in. There were grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. Birthday parties and holidays with family became a new tradition. One of our favorite holidays became July 4th because my brothers-in-law had a love for fireworks that quickly became the tradition at our home. The kids were settling into school and we were feeling more stable in our jobs.

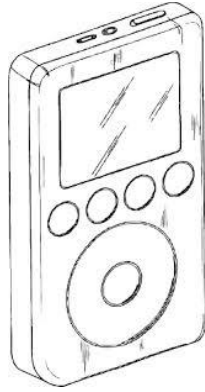
What is the definition of home? Is it a tangible place or a feeling? Is it family? I may not have the answer to that question, but what I do know is that since our move from Colorado to Missouri we have a place

we call home, a peaceful feeling, and family we love. Our kids are growing up differently than I did. They will be able to have a place they grew up and a place they went to school. Our house may not be the dream house, but I wouldn't trade it for living on the cul-de-sac city life and I wouldn't trade the peaceful night air for the partying neighbors. The jobs we have now are the best jobs we've ever had and are providing opportunities to better our future that we would have never had if we had stayed in Colorado. The peaceful feeling we have when worshiping in the same church we've attended for over nine years and where our son is now employed is like being home each time we walk through the doors. The family we enjoy on July 4th year after year in the same place at the same time is the best feeling ever.

Yes, this move would have a lasting effect on who I am. Through the good times and the bad, I have learned to settle down. I have learned that having a place to call home is worth a lot. I may have a restless heart, but through the experience of moving to a place with family, friends and traditions and living in one place for longer than I've ever lived anywhere, I have a place to call home.

A New Generation

Ruth Weese



Is it possible to begin a new educational heritage? According to, “The Condition of Education 2012”, more high school students are going to college than ever before. Dr. Kathryn W. Christmas (Kate) and I have had many conversations about the importance of education. Although she is my boss, she has taken an interest in the educational future of my children, and it was Kate that inspired me to begin my own college education. There are three major differences between Kate’s educational experience and mine. Her educational heritages, the timing of her college experience, and the passion she had for her equestrian sport all played an important part in her educational experience. During my most recent conversation with Kate, I gained insight from her educational experience so that I and my children can be the first in both mine and my husband’s family to graduate from college.

Kate’s heritages were a critical part of directing her education. Kate’s grandfather was a college professor. She described one of her earliest memories as, “I spent a lot of time with my grandmother and I remember, as a small child, she and I walking up grand stone stairs of the college where my grandfather taught to have lunch with him.” She also remembers her father doing homework to earn his MBA. I, on the other hand, do not have any recollection of either of my grandfathers, but I’ve been told that they were loggers. My father only attended school until the 10th grade before he quit to take care of his family, and although my mother graduated high school, she very quickly became a wife and mother with no thought of a further education. Kate said, “Something catastrophic would had to have happened for me not to go to college.” For her, obtaining a college degree was expected. Through our conversation I learned that even though she and I had completely different education heritages, it was not too late to provide a heritage for my children. By my example of hard work and accomplishments, they will be inspired to pursue their own college education.

As attending college was expected, Kate went directly from high school to college. “My parents told me that I should get the best grades possible, so that I could get into the best school possible.” Her parents told her they would do everything possible to help her get into the best college as long as she did her part to earn the grades. That incentive gave Kate a drive

to do her best, and she began college immediately after high school. Personally, I never had a thought of attending college while I was in high school. My grades were average, at best, and my goal was to graduate and move on to real life. As I look back today, I wonder why not even my high school counselor encouraged me to go to college. It wasn't until just recently, at almost 46 years old, that I was inspired to attend college. If I would have attended college immediately after high school, my career path, and struggles I've had along the way, would be completely different. I would not have had to settle for low paying jobs just to get by. Today, I am making a point to stay involved in my children's education. My husband and I made it clear to our son that living at home after high school graduation was not an option unless he was pursuing a full-time college education. We are also having early conversations with our teenaged daughter about where she will attend college and the grades she needs to obtain in high school in order to succeed in college. I know that the timing of when my kids begin their college education will have a significant impact on their educational success.

During her early school years, Kate became involved in playing soccer, as well as equestrian sporting events like barrel racing. After a severe soccer injury, she decided to focus on equestrian sports and soon developed a passion for horses. That passion for horses fueled her career goal to become a veterinarian. "I had a pony that

got sick and needed a veterinarian. Unfortunately, my pony died, but it was that experience that made me know I wanted to become a veterinarian." Kate said that her passion for horses fueled her drive to learn as much as possible about how to take care of them. This is a major difference between her experience and mine. I was always the one chosen last for the school baseball or kickball teams and my parents did not encourage me to participate in extra-curricular activities. I didn't have any life experiences, sporting or otherwise, that gave me an inspiration to pursue a higher education. However, my children are learning that driving their education from their interests will make pursuing a college education much easier. My son has always enjoyed working with children at church and school, and is now pursuing a degree in elementary education. He also has an incredible natural ability with technology, and will literally jump up and down in excitement after repairing a broken computer. I am confident his career will include some type of technology. By having a passion for children and technology, he has been inspired to continue his college experience.

"I was having fun!" That's how Kate describes her high school and college years. Kate's parents made it clear that her job while she was in school was to study and obtain the best grades possible. She only worked during the summer while in school, so her focus could be on grades. She also lived on the college campus and had the

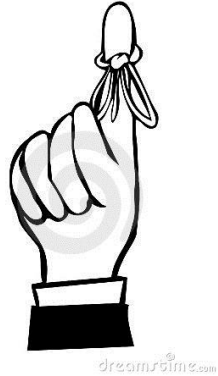
privilege of participating in social activities. For me, not only was school an academic struggle, it was anything but fun. I was a social miss-fit and endured many very difficult days of ridicule for my lack of social and academic skills. I worked half-days during my senior year in high school, and began full time immediately after graduation. Focusing full time on my education, rather than working full time while attending college part time, would make my life now much easier. There are many times when I feel like I am neglecting my family, my job, or both because of the time I need to focus on school. This is another example of how I want my children to have a different experience than mine. I would love for them to experience fun in their education.

Kate said, "I once told my parents I wanted to train horses as my career, and they told me that was a hobby, not a career". By being an example, fueling her passion for horses, and helping her to stay focused, Kate went on to obtain a doctorate degree in Veterinary Medicine. There was never a question whether or not Kate would go to college, but for me, there was never a thought of attending college. So, even though I may not have begun my college career until I was 46 years old, I will someday graduate and provide a new educational heritage for my children. I am also hopeful that when my children observe how challenging it is to attend college while working full time and taking care of a family, they will make the determination to

follow their passions and time their education while they are young. Kate's educational experience was very different from mine, but it is my hope that the heritage and life experiences I provide to my children now will make a difference in all of our lives.

“I Forgot!”

Amanda Greer



The terms ADD and ADHD are so widely used in today's society that it would be uncommon to come across someone who has not heard the two terms and know what they indicate. The terms are so closely related that they are often used interchangeably. However they are, in fact, different in one very critical way; people with ADHD have the hyperactivity aspect whereas people with ADD do not. According to Russell Barkley, Ph.D. and Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at the Medical University of South Carolina, in a classroom of 30 students there are an average of one to three children who have either condition, and boys are over two times more likely to be diagnosed than girls. Some sufferers go their entire childhood and even into adulthood without being diagnosed; my husband, Joe, being one of those people was diagnosed with ADD at the age of 24. ADD made school especially difficult for Joe because it caused him to

have difficulty paying attention due to wandering thoughts, failure to understand the material being taught, the inability to remember important facts or events, and having to learn to cope with the condition.

While speaking with Joe about his experiences in school, the most common issue that occurred was that his ADD made it difficult for him to pay attention in class, specifically because he often had wandering thoughts. "The teacher could be talking about the Periodic Table in science class and because of the ADD, ten other unrelated thoughts would pop into my head at the same time, which made it very hard to concentrate" he explained. The inability to pay attention is, according to Joe's parents, the primary reason for his issues in school. His father, Mike, explained that he was an average student, with average grades, but without the ADD Mike believes he could have been an "exceptional student." Joe especially had trouble doing homework and studying because of the wandering thoughts; he would often get discouraged because it was difficult to focus on the task at hand with his ADD constantly throwing random thoughts through his head. The wandering thoughts also distracted him to the point where he would get frustrated and simply give up before the information had been absorbed. At times teachers would not accept Joe's work because of a detail as miniscule as his name missing from the paper; a detail that seems so obvious to anyone without ADD. All of this frustration and lack of concentration is

one reason Joe's grades were average, and also why school seemed so much more difficult for him than for his peers.

Another issue Joe's ADD presented was the lack of understanding, usually due to missed information. A prime example of this for him occurred when he was in third grade, his teacher assigned a math assignment focusing on estimating, which was covered for a long period of time in class. Every day the teacher would give an estimating assignment that would be due by recess time; if the students failed to finish the assignment, they would forfeit their recess. Because of his ADD, Joe was the only student in class who was having issues with the assignments because he did not understand estimating. Hearing about this particular event made it very difficult to understand what must have been going through Joe's mind as a nine year old boy being told he was not allowed to go outside to recess because he simply did not understand the material. Although several years later, after being diagnosed with ADD and learning about the condition, Joe says, "It finally made sense why that had happened, why I didn't understand. There were times when I felt like I just wasn't smart, and I finally knew, it really wasn't my fault." Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for ADD sufferers to feel as though they are at fault for the issues the condition presents. Not grasping the material made Joe feel as though he was somehow at fault for the trouble he was having in school, and in turn, made him feel as though he were

an inadequate student and diminishing his interest in his education.

Another serious obstacle for Joe in school was remembering important information, especially for tests. He explained that he could study for several hours per night but at test time it would be as if he had not studied at all. "I don't know how many times I got tests back with comments from the teacher asking me to elaborate, and I tried while I was taking the test, but I just couldn't remember every detail." Missing information can be linked to ADD because it is common for ADD sufferers to have anxiety during stressful situations, causing the person's mind to wander and get distracted or off topic. This aspect of the condition also caused issues in school for Joe due to information being missed, certain aspects of details may be forgotten, and therefore cause the information to be incomplete.

ADD is a difficult condition to deal with, not only for the sufferer, but also for those around that person on a normal basis; especially if the condition is undiagnosed and untreated. It can be very difficult and frustrating to not understand something that comes so easily to others if a person is unaware of why they do not understand. When Joe was finally diagnosed with at the age of 24 it was a huge relief for him, but also for his parents, who at times questioned if perhaps something was wrong with him that was causing his issues. "It felt as though a

weight had been lifted off all our shoulders, it was such a relief to know it wasn't his fault; he couldn't help it," Mike explains. Joe's ADD had been somewhat elusive, presenting problems in his life but somehow not being pinpointed or diagnosed. Learning to deal with this invisible condition caused issues for Joe in school making it difficult to enjoy school thus abating his desire to do well.

The lack of understanding, inability to understand materials, remembering information, and dealing with an undiagnosed condition made it very difficult for Joe to get through school successfully. Looking at this issue from an outside perspective, it is easy to understand why he said he did not enjoy school; his condition exhibited so many issues that, if it were me in his shoes, I would not enjoy school either. Dr. Barkley also says that 35 percent of ADD sufferers will eventually drop out of school because of the obstacles it presents. Joe was not another statistic; despite the struggles presented by his condition he conquered his goal of graduating high school with his diploma, and with the help of medication, has gone on to conquer his ADD as well.

Poverty and Education

James Minor



The US economy is in a state of chaos and its future looks bleak. The unemployment rate is up, the slowly recovering housing market is still down, our standard of education has fallen well under the world average, and more and more our city's downtown resembles a 3rd world nation. Throughout my life I have been exposed to multiple extremes in society, from drug addicts and athletes, to missionaries and special operations in the military. During the journey of life, my travels have taken me to almost a dozen countries, most of which have been riddled with famine and destitution. From exposure to such gross poverty, I have learned that an education is the key characteristic that determines the outcome of a person's life, and indigence follows closely behind its absence. In this country, we take education for granted. With almost all of us having the opportunity to learn how to read and write, there is a complete disregard for what life would be like if they were a foreign skill to

us. While some people come from an encouraging family, such as Eudora Welty described in *One Writers Beginnings*, and others come from broken homes looking for an escape like Keith Gilyard depicted in his writing *First Lessons*, a driving force has to be cultivated in order to do well enough in our academics to continue on with our education. Similar to what Gail Goodwin described in her narrative *The Watcher at the Gates*. No matter our upbringing or the obstacles we face, an internal motivation toward education is the defining trait that will push our lives into success.

Our families can play a very large role in our attitude toward education, both good and bad. In *One Writers Beginnings*, Eudora Welty described her parents encouragement toward an education stating, "I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me---as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting---into knowledge of the world, into reading and spelling, by way of the alphabet. They taught it to me at home in time for me to begin to read before starting school" (301). Her mother often read to her in multiple rooms of the house, and both parents would make sacrifices to buy her books as gifts for birthdays and Christmas. It was not unusual for Welty to see her mother reading for enjoyment throughout her childhood. All of these things positively influenced her attitude toward education. I however, came from a different type of household. With an absentee father figure and my mother working full time on a night

shift, I was left to make sure I completed homework and had to take the initiative to produce good grades in school. While we had many books in the house, I, in my ten year old mindset, would very seldom read outside of the required work for school. I had to learn the discipline to maintain high marks and my encouragement came from the grades I received, rather than home life. This proved to be challenging, but it developed a sense of accomplishment that would carry through many years. Understanding our young perceptions of people we deemed as successful can direct the outlook we have toward academics.

An education can commonly offer an escape from our home life and socioeconomic status, similar to what Keith Gilyard alluded to in *First Lessons*. He explained that during a reading lesson, “My mother was beaming and I had her undivided attention until Judy came out of somewhere, slid the edge of a razor blade into the side of my face clear to the bone, narrowly missing my eye, and ripped a deep diagonal clean past my ear” (284-285). In his writing he depicts a normality of corporal punishment and fierce sibling rivalry. Going to kindergarten was a way to avoid conflict not only with his two sisters, but from the whippings he regularly received from his mother for misbehavior. I have similar experiences, not being cut by a sibling, but that education was a way for me to remove myself from the constant bickering and fighting with my brother and sisters, gaining positive attention from my

mother. This again, encouraged me to maintain good grades in classes. I would dig into school work and spend hours locked away in my room to produce what I thought was an appropriate outcome for my labors, sometimes missing dinner and the opportunity to go play outside with the neighborhood kids. From a young age I was willing to do what was needed to complete assignments, and would often sacrifice running through the local creek for learning. Whether intentional or not, the issues we face from our childhood can be a predetermining factor in our education.

The internal force that compels us to meet the expectations that we, or our circumstances, have placed on us often pushes us past what some might perceive as necessary. Gail Goodwin expressed such a force she named her “inner critic” in *The Watcher at the Gates*:

I discussed him with other writers, who told me some of the quirks and habits of their Watchers, each of whom was as individual as his host, and all of whom seemed passionately dedicated to one goal: rejecting too soon and discriminating too severely...And they would rather die (and take your inspiration with them) than risk making a fool of themselves (291).

She put a name to the motivation that would push her to stop in the middle of writing and look up specifics about details, and found this was shared by other writers.

It would push them to eccentric idiosyncrasies in order to make their writing as perfected as possible to avoid failure. I think we all have a level of that type of motivation. Some of us know how to deal with it better than others; those of us who have more are often called “perfectionists” by those who have less. Again, I can relate to this idea. Often I still find myself striving past normal limits of others in order to deter failure. I would like to think that the idea of not displaying what I consider complete effort is an alien concept to me. An overriding sense of accomplishment and the underlying fear of failure can drive people to preform above expectations in the majority of endeavors attempted, education being one of them.

There are many things that shape our attitude toward education, and many things that will contribute to success or failure. The upbringing we face as kids and the obstacles we encounter from that upbringing are all things that we will have to overcome at one point in our academic path, but it is our obligation to negotiate them however uncompromising they seem. If we come to an accomplishment in our education and still find ourselves on the brink of poverty we have done something terribly wrong. No one is going to hand you a good life or an education. Your hard work and determination are the only things that will carry you through to your goals, and very seldom will people come along side of you to give encouragement. Developing an unyielding will to negotiate

obstacles is the only thing that will keep you until you reach the level of success you strive toward.

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The Breaking Point

James Minor



The decay of American education is staggering. It seems that more and more the youth of our nation are choosing to drop out of high school and lock themselves into entry level and minimum wage jobs. Yet, the mainstream media has not only continued to ignore the issue, they have glamorized individuals who hold education in very low regard. We have all witnessed this first hand everywhere people under 21 work; they are unable to count change without the aid of a computer, and are unwilling to be out of arms reach of their cell phones. One can't help but ask the question; where is the break down, where is the failing point? I, unfortunately, was one of the statistical youth who had difficulties in school, and it wasn't until my early 20's that I realized the problems I faced as a teenager are a commonality across the country. The break-down of my family structure, illicit drug use, and the following disenchantment with education

ultimately lead to my dropping out of high school before I understood that decision would affect the rest of my life.

One of the most influential structures for children is their early family as affirmed in the book "The Other Wes Moore" by Wes Moore. The author describes a series of interviews with an incarcerated Wes Moore attempting to gain an understanding how kids raised not far from each other, with the same name and similar childhood backgrounds, ended up in such different places in life. One of the questions the imprisoned Wes asked the author was when he felt that he had become a man. His thinking was,

There was no official ceremony that brought my childhood to an end. Instead, crises or other circumstances presented me with adult-sized responsibilities and obligations that I had to meet one way or another. For some boys, this happens later--in late teens or even twenties--allowing them to grow organically into adulthood. But for some of us, the promotion to adulthood, or at least its challenges, is so jarring, so sudden, that we enter into it unprepared and might be undone by it. (66)

The author explained that there are some children that are allowed to gradually grow into adulthood in a more natural way, however, there are some that it gets thrust upon. Whether they are ready or not, they have to rise to meet the obstacles set in front of them. I can identify with Moore

because when I was eight my parents divorced, leaving me to fend for myself to gain guidance and direction in life. With my father out of the parenting equation, my mother was forced to work full time and go back to college to provide for me and my siblings. This caused her to be out of the house for extended periods of time. I was left with very little accountability, and the responsibility of doing well in school rested on my young shoulders.

In the same book, Moore elaborated how a child's lack of foresight can greatly affect their future. He illustrated a scene from his early teenage years when he had just been sent to military school because his grades were failing and he had developed apathy toward education. His mother was desperate for a way to correct his behavior, and decided that sending him away was in his best interest. He recounted multiple attempts of escape to return to his familiar life, but his mother insisted he stay:

These forks in the road can happen so fast for young boys; within months or even weeks, their journeys can take a decisive and possibly irrevocable turn. With no intervention—or the wrong intervention—they can last forever.
(95)

As depicted by Moore, he was at a critical juncture in his life. If he returned to his neighborhood he would surely fall prey to the drug epidemic that had engulfed his city, and if he stayed in the military school, however foreign and unfamiliar, he would

have an opportunity to succeed and make a productive life for himself. I can relate to the authors feelings. After graduating into high school I fell in with kids from similar broken homes. We were all looking for acceptance and we found it from each other. It just all happened to be centered on drugs. I still had minimal accountability in my home life, no one to steer me in the right direction away from the choices that were daunting as a young teenager. These were very hard for me to face alone, and eventually the desire to work full time to make enough money to support my habits became more important as my grades and attendance became less of a concern.

Moore explained a situation from the institutionalized Wes's childhood about how, from a young age, things other than education can become more important and time consuming. He was also from a broken home with the father out of the picture, and his mother worked full time to support the family:

As football became more important in Wes's life, his performance in school declined. His test scores were high enough to make it to the next grade, but not high enough to make a legitimate argument that he'd learned anything. (29)

This instance marked a turning point in the young Wes's life. It was the start of him becoming distracted from his studies and ended with a gross display of anger, showing that he had not developed any

coping skills for when conflicts arise. Again, this strikes a nerve with me. I entered high school with top marks and played a starting position on the varsity soccer team as a freshman. The more involved with drugs I got, the less I cared about school, until my grade point average dropped below the minimum to play sports. Without the connection to school I felt I had no reason to continue going and subsequently dropped out. Just as Moore describes, the distractions pulling attention away from school work might seem innocent enough, but if gone unchecked they can lead down a very negative path.

Children are at a pivotal point in their emotional development when we release them into the influences of modern education. They are still very impressionable and have learned from every experience in their life, both good and bad. The impact of a broken family pushes them into a society unprepared for the decisions they will face. It leaves them feeling bewildered and confused, so when difficult choices confront them the confidence to make the right decision is an extreme challenge. They are still naive to the long term repercussions of their actions, and too often have to learn from negative experiences. So, where is the failing point? In my opinion, it's not in the dilapidated educational system. It stems from the home life of every child, and we, as an American culture, have sacrificed the youth our country to entertainment and technology. As long as we continue to turn a blind eye

to the impact of neglecting our children, we are all responsible for the unfortunate direction this country is spiraling toward.

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What Drives Your Success?

James Minor



Our educational experiences can be as diverse as the people we meet in our daily lives. Some enjoy success with education and continue on to college, while others choose a different route completely. Whatever the underlying reasons are for the academic choices a person makes, the path of least resistance is not often found waiting for them. Obstacles can be placed in front of us before we have a chance to avoid them. This is one such instance. Ron Minor, born in 1947- a polio survivor since the age of six and classified as mentally retarded from the disease, faced an uphill battle before he understood that he had the power to change it. His struggles forged a demeanor to negotiate obstacles and refocused his weaknesses into a desire to help children with similar disabilities. It is not unusual that our attitude plays a key role in the decisions we make. Our past will continue to dictate our present unless we

make a conscious effort to change.

The polio wreaked havoc on Ron's body and spirit. It eventually settled in his jaws and brainstem; he spent months in the hospital as a child. "Somewhere along the way everything went blank. I'm told that I went into a coma for days or a week. I really don't know," he recalled. The disease left him physically awkward and mentally disabled. He was a year behind his peers when he restarted the first grade, and his inability to comprehend conventional instruction made him the object of ridicule from the older students. "I probably wasn't mentally retarded. I think that I would be more inclined to be learning disabled. However, with their testing [at the time], I was always below the mean standard, and they determined that's where I was at." His recollection took on a very sobering tone as he revisited the humiliation he endured. I could tell that this time in his life was a crucial juncture that forever shaped his personality. As he continued to recount his early years in school, his enthusiasm to help the socially outcast became apparent. I believe this is where he began to develop the compassion to help children with learning disabilities in an attempt to spare them the emotional hardships that he suffered.

Ron, feeling removed from society and not having a father figure, was desperately searching for himself, and in 1965 he decided to join the military. "I was captivated by the Marine Corps slogan at

the time, which was 'the Marine Corps builds men,' and I was very much interested in what it meant to be a man. I didn't ever feel like, from the western culture's point of view, I fit that category," he explained. After achieving an exemplary military record through his tour of duty in the Viet Nam War, and from the persuasion of his wife, he determined to leave the service and move back to Moberly, Missouri. Once there, his wife enrolled in the local community college and Ron worked a handful of unsatisfying jobs. He had a difficult time in school and was hesitant to be submitted to the same academic environment that he remembered. Realizing that attending college was the fastest way to advance toward his goals, he reluctantly attempted two courses. "I found that I excelled in classes. They didn't require any writing, only verbal communication, and that I could do...I did quite well in college, and at the end of two years I got a scholarship to go to Kirksville University in Kirksville, Missouri..." This reminded me that sometimes we cannot see our attitude because we shape our life on the experiences we have had, accepting them as truth no matter how incorrect they might be. Our mind set can be the predetermining factor that decides whether we pass or fail, if we reach our goals or fall short of success. It often decides our outcome before we begin endeavors, and affects our motivation throughout the various situations we face.

After a complete paradigm shift in his attitude toward education, Ron

continued on to graduate from Kirksville with a bachelor's degree, specializing in elementary age children with learning disabilities and the behaviorally disturbed. He was instrumental in developing an alternative school program for the Fort Osage school district, preparing students with the skills needed to become functional members of society. He eventually obtained a master's degree in curriculum development from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri. "I thoroughly enjoyed working with the students, and writing [the curriculum]. The challenge of how best the students learned and writing it specifically for them. Watching their faces as they got the idea. They understood the concept; they could move on with it. They found success. I just thoroughly loved it," he exclaimed. I asked Ron if he would have done anything differently with his education, he confidently answered, "No, I wouldn't have change a thing." Realizing his potential and being able to help countless kids succeed in education would have been practically impossible if he had not attempted college. His early academic career was full of bullying and conflict, but somewhere something changed and he was willing to make a sincere effort to reconcile his opinions about education. If he had not questioned the labels that he was given in his childhood, his life, and the lives of multiple other people, would not be as enriched as they are today. He chose not to let his past command his present, or his future.

The choice to continue on with an education is not always an easy decision. Especially when our past experiences have been difficult to overcome. Our failures can be a stumbling block, or the motivation to press into the challenge and better our self, proving that our negative preconceived notions are, in fact, a lie. If our past continues unchallenged, it will continue to repeat itself, and limit our ability to aspire toward the level of success that we are able to achieve. By identifying our attitude, we can prepare accordingly for all things we encounter. Our choices in life are the vehicles that deliver our dreams, and the decision to drive the car or sit in the passenger seat is yours, and yours alone to make.

Stand Strong

Niche Myers



No one ever wants to believe it can happen to them. I never in my wildest dreams ever thought it would happen to me. I didn't grow up around violent people, I believed when someone said they loved you that it meant they would never lay a hand on you. I was in for a shock when I got older. Once a weak sapling, I had to grow into a strong tree: one that could not be knocked down, no matter what storm blew through.

After thirteen years of marriage and years of being told by my mother-in-law that I was worthless, I had built a large wall around myself hoping that would protect me from others that thought that of me. I broke free of that toxic relationship with my mother-in-law, ending in divorce and freeing myself from my evil monster-in-law. This was a big step for me as I had never been on my own before.

The next year, things looked promising. I was raising two kids on my own, working full time, and managing a

house. After being alone for a year, I decided it was time to re-enter the dating scene.

Being shy and of little confidence, I explored the world of internet dating. I joined a singles chat site and began chatting with several people from around the area. I was cautious of what I revealed to people about personal life. One never knows who is sitting on the other side of the computer screen. I met a man named David on this site. He was sweet and charming. We chatted for several weeks, it was something to look forward to after work, checking my emails for messages, and smiling when I saw I had some waiting. We talked about our likes and dislikes and found that we had several things in common. After chatting for a few weeks, he asked to meet. My fingers froze on the keyboard. I knew this would eventually come up in the conversation but I didn't know it would make me so nervous. I agreed to meet, being cautious, I let my friend know the details for a "just in case" situation.

I agreed to meet at his house. As I drove over in my Jeep Cherokee, my nervousness increased.

I pulled up and he was standing in the front yard. He was tall, 6'1", and had sparkling blue eyes. We talked for hours. It was getting late and I knew I needed to check in with my friend before the cops were sent out to rescue me. We agreed on another date for the weekend.

As time and many dates flew by, we

grew closer and decided to take our relationship to the next level. He moved into my house. He also had 2 kids that he saw on the weekends and during the summer months. Our 2 families merged. He didn't have much to bring into the relationship, clothes mostly and a hidden anger I had not yet seen.

It was the calm before the storm. He brought me out of my shell, introducing me to the outdoors, hunting, fishing and tent camping. I was never much on the outdoors but quickly learned to love it. He took me to places that I generally didn't like going to, bars, parties and being around large crowds. I became a different person, my branches now opening and sprouting new leaves.

After a year of being together, I slowly started to see the anger that was once hidden. I started being called names by David when something didn't go right, such as fat worthless cow. We would argue, saying hateful things and then retreating to separate rooms to cool down. Money problems slowly crept into the arguments. I tried my best to smooth things over and avoid the harsh verbal beating. The bad thing was that if it wasn't me he focused his anger on, he would turn to his son. I could feel the wall that I had worked so hard to demolish, resurrect.

The verbal abuse turned to physical abuse. I would get glasses of tea thrown in my face, pushed or shoved into walls, things that didn't leave visible marks. I felt myself

slowly dying inside. The anger this man had inside him was like a tornado ready to touch down and uproot me where I stood.

I withdrew from my friends and family. I tried to protect his son by getting him madder at me, it took his attention away from the boy. The last year, I had enough. I felt dead inside and I was putting my kids through something that could potentially harm them. I discovered he was talking to another woman. I gathered all my courage and confronted him. We were sitting across from each other at the kitchen table, I was making checks out for monthly bills. As soon as the words escaped my mouth, I regretted it. His anger exploded like a hurricane. He picked the box of checks up and threw them at me, hitting me in the chest. I said nothing. I continued writing my checks, trying to hide my fear. He got up from his chair and said he was leaving. Before I could stop myself, I blurted out, "Bye see ya". That was a big mistake. I braced myself for what was about to happen. I was suddenly being lifted out of my chair by the ponytail in my hair. Like a rag doll, he threw me across the kitchen. The chair I had been sitting in had caught on my leg and both myself and the chair landed hard against the cabinet. I lay in a fetal position, wrapping my arms around my head for protection. What seemed like a lifetime, I heard his footsteps drawing near to me. I felt a hand grab my arm and my body was being lifted off the floor. He embraced me and repeatedly said "I'm sorry". I pulled away and walked past this

evil man. I gathered my children, (his children were with their mother) and as I walked out the door, I told him to be gone by the time I came home from work. It wasn't until later that night that I discovered I had a large bruise on my arm and back of my leg. I returned to an empty house, empty of him and his belongings. Walking through my house and seeing that he was gone, I broke down and cried. I cried tears of relief that this person was gone.

No longer a dying sapling, I had survived a storm that allowed me to grow into a strong standing tree.

Motherhood

Amanda Georges



It's important to say, I have never wanted to have children of my own. I've never felt that mothering urge to give birth. I don't feel time ticking away on my biological time clock and I don't know if I ever will. I am a very selfish person in general. I've always had plans to travel the world, taste pasta in Italy and see the bright colored spices of an Indian market. Children were just never part of the plan but neither was falling in love with a single dad.

I met my husband and fell in love almost instantly but there wasn't an immediate connection upon meeting Junior, his son, for the first time. In reality, he was a fat six month old infant who drooled all over himself and pooped his pants. There wasn't a, "This is my son and I love him" moment. I've been around children my whole life with having eight nieces and nephews, my mother running a home daycare for fifteen years, and myself working in a church daycare for three. He

was like every other child. He was somebody else's. It took a long time before we spent any real time together. My husband and I were very cautious on that. We wanted to make sure things were working out with us before bringing him into the picture.

We got married and became a family on July fourth two thousand ten. Living together was definitely a lot harder than any of us had expected. Before I could walk away, now it's not an option. Junior was always in my things, my time, my space and my money. I didn't have any time to prepare for motherhood. I didn't get the nine months others get; there wasn't a sonogram to fall in love with and a baby shower to enjoy. We jumped head first not really knowing what to expect.

It took a year before we fell into a routine and were comfortable with each other; but eventually we found our middle ground and I began to fall into the role of being a mom. We discovered our common likes and dislikes. Junior and I both enjoy sports and are both very competitive. We love video games, *Call Of Duty* to be exact. We love to watch *American Dad* and *Family Guy*. One thing that helped us bond was the fact that Junior struggles with school. At a parent/teacher conference in Kindergarten his teacher feared he might have a learning disability and suggested he would need to see a specialist. It hit us hard and we wondered what the best way to help him was. I ended up going online to find

different ways to help. I would watch the schoolwork he brought home and we made up our own homework to go along with it. We set aside about an hour a night for homework and before long we started to notice a difference. No longer were we getting negative notes home and papers with red hash marks all over them. By the end of the year he was all caught up and he even received an award for the most book reports. It was truly a proud moment and one of the first times I can remember thinking, I love this kid!

Our shared love of sports brought us together too. He loves baseball and is very good at it. He was ranked top five in K-ball for the league; and now that he's moved up to Mustangs, he loves to pitch. I am at every game and can be heard over everyone else cheering for him and the team. He is also an avid dirt bike/ATV rider. He dabbles in racing and loves to show off his many tricks whenever he can.

Junior is a lot like his father who is a great guy and a loving dad. He looks and acts just like him. My husband loves to rough house, ride bikes and eat Captain Crunch before bed. My husband is a big kid himself and he truly loves being a father. Although we are married, we currently do not live together. My husband is a drug addict. He has struggled with his addiction to Speed for eight years and is currently losing his fight. It's tough when I have to find an answer to "Where's daddy?" and "When is dad coming home?" But as

much as I am there for him, he also helps me. He occupies my time and thoughts so I am not sitting around asking myself, "Where is he?" and "Is he coming home today?"

I didn't move into motherhood overnight, as it has been eight years since we met each other. It definitely hasn't been a smooth ride. We've been through our ups and downs and I am a better person because of it. Junior has taught me patience, understanding and unconditional love. He is the reason I am back in school and I take extra shifts at work. My life revolves around him. What he needs and wants come first. What sport he's playing dictates most of the evening activities. He counts on me; he gives me a reason to keep going. I couldn't imagine loving him anymore than I do. Not even if I had given birth to him myself. He is my son and I am proud to be his mom.

About the Authors

Talia Allen: Talia is a fine writer and critical thinker who expresses herself in writing extremely well and with a certain stylistic flair, as exhibited in this publication. She clearly savors putting her thoughts to paper and then discussing them in both the classroom and in individual conference venues. Her instinctive ability to accept and act upon constructive criticism helps her greatly in honing her skill as a rather exceptional young essayist. (From Professor Marmaud)

Andrea Brown: Andrea is an accomplished wordsmith as can be witnessed by her two excellent essays in this publication. Her inquisitive nature and her strong desire to reach high standards which she has set for herself to lead her to constantly question, rethink, revise, and produce first rate writing. A perfectionist by nature, she has blossomed into a thoughtful and rather remarkable essayist. (From Professor Marmaud)

Dorinda Chambers: Dorinda is a very dedicated student who works hard on her writing. She often was the first in the class to have her draft done, and she was always striving to make it better. She seemed particularly inspired when she had the opportunity to write about meaningful experiences from her own life, so she is a good example of a writer who "writes what she knows." As we might suspect, this is not Dorinda's first published piece. Like the theme of her paper "The Lost Boys" suggests, she believes in the importance of making good decisions and taking responsibility for her own life. These character traits along with her persistence will take her far as a writer. (From Professor Bartels)

Bailey Clutter: Bailey is a shy student, but eager and excited to do well, and when she shared in class it was profound. Her love of reading shows in "Reading & Me," and much of her work this semester was spent exploring how reading and writing were connected in her life. She also taught me a lot about fan fiction and fantasy and how these genres can be powerful ways for people to escape the tough situations they've had to endure. (From Professor Dockery)

Dantana Conway: Dantana came to class every day, ready to work hard and eager to learn. Even though she was quiet and even often shy, she always asked questions if she was unsure about what to do and how to best do it. Dantana's early drafts showed that she needed practice, so writing a publishable essay is evidence of how hard she worked throughout the semester. The voice in "Struggles Through Adoption" reveals Dantana's sweet, caring nature. Just be careful if you stop her to say hello. You might be stopping her twin sister by mistake! (From Professor Bartels)

Jennifer Easter: Jennifer once revealed to me that when she writes a paper, she always goes back through, deletes nearly all of it, and rewrites it, usually at least three times before letting anyone read it. Her first drafts are actually third drafts and she would still revise papers again after earning a grade. I think "Midwest Vegan" is a paper that shows this hard work with revision. Her talent is definitely in writing significant details. (From Professor Dockery)

Edna Frimpong: Edna Frimpong is a bright student who has a bright future. She is inquisitive and teachable, sharp yet open, focused but still affable, the definition of a joy to have in class. She has come a long way from her native land in order to learn and take advantage of opportunities. And she's done so by increasing her ability to write with power. I am one proud instructor. (From Professor Andrews)

Amanda Georges: Amanda Georges' road to becoming a published writer started out bumpy. As a child she overcame a speech impediment that had initially caused her to fall behind grade level in reading. However she steadily made progress and made up the deficit. Amanda, who excelled in athletics from early on, developed the determination to excel in academics as well. She does not consider herself to be an avid reader, but nonetheless reads more than just the assigned work, especially consuming biographies and autobiographies. Of course she has also honed her writing abilities. In what follows, she tells a story of how she moved from being a reluctant parent to her infant stepson to a mother committed to the welfare of her son. (From Professor Frogge)

Amanda Greer: Amanda Greer approaches her writing with a willingness to take feedback and direction at a great depth of understanding of the writing process and self. When many developing writers shy away from touchy or emotional topics, she eagerly pushes herself to delve into a deeper understanding of both writing and herself as a way of processing her experiences. Amanda truly writes with her whole heart. (From Professor Reinert)

Unique Higgins: Unique's name is so fitting for her personality. Her love of language is deeply rooted in music, as "Accidental Songs" reveals. This paper shows how writing can be something of a comfort, that it can be our friend, that sometimes seeing what we think can help us find a way to distinguish our voices from the crowd. (From Professor Dockery)

Court Jensen: Court came into class already loving the act of writing and he'd bring in copies of *Tuning Fork* to share with us his published writing done outside of the classroom. All of his writing matters a great deal to him and "My Metamorphosis" is a paper that definitely shows his ability to consider how even small things in our lives can touch us so deeply, how the people in our lives can surprise us with their ability to support our dreams. (From Professor Dockery)

James Minor: James Minor continually demonstrates dedication to all of his tasks both in class and as he works to pursue his career goals. As he writes, James blends his experiences with a stylish composition of the written word. Frequently James seeks to further his understanding of class concepts in a manner that includes structure and style. (From Professor Reinert)

Niche Myers: Niche Myers says that books and book lovers were part of her life from as far back as she can remember. She grew into a person who loves to immerse herself in reading, especially enjoying the experience of intense emotion--to laugh, to be afraid, or to have a good cry. She recounts how growing up she would not only read books but also trade them with family members and discuss the characters and plots therein. Surely this contributed in a mighty way to her passion for books. By the way, she also enjoys writing such that this is not the first time one of her compositions has been published. So we can expect more to come. (From Professor Frogge)

Angie Patterson: I remember when I assigned Task 1 and Angie came in with a draft nearly a full week early, eager for feedback and discussion about how to make it better. She is definitely not a procrastinator and it shows in all of her papers. “Self-Doubt” is a paper that really speaks to her own personal struggles with writing and with learning to trust her own voice, a paper I think most students and writers can relate to in many ways. (From Professor Dockery)

Dedrick Skinner: Dedrick Skinner’s rough draft of his essay, “My Literacy Biography,” showed great promise. His writing style was rather plain, but surprisingly elegant. After he revised his draft for the final submission of the Task Paper #2, I realized he was eager and willing to accept constructive criticism of his work and to make an effort to write a true revision. He went beyond editing and created a truly revised work. Dedrick reported not having many challenging writing assignments in high school so was not aware he had writing capabilities until he enrolled in English 100. He did not believe his first Task Paper effort was well-done, but rose to the challenge for his second Task Paper. He attributes his being able to develop a college writing style as helping him perform well in ENG 100. Passing that course, he says, has given him greater confidence going into ENG 104. And I am fortunate that Dedrick is now a student in my ENG 104 class this term. (From Professor Murray)

Ruth Weese: Ruth Weese adeptly balances her responsibilities as a wife and mother as she works full time and attends classes in the evening. Inspired to return to school by those with whom she works, Ruth strives to set an example for her peers and her children through her constant pursuit of not just exemplary grades in classes but a deeper understanding of all course content. Mrs. Weiss developed into an adept writer throughout the semester, and she will continue to be a success throughout her schooling. (From Professor Reinert)

Courtney Yount: Courtney came into class disliking writing and had never had a good experience in English class that she could recall. But, because of her open mind and her curiosity, she excelled at writing papers that questioned her own experiences and ideas. In class, she often has some of the most mature and insightful responses to readings, and she has a talent for structure which shows especially in her paper “Roadblocks to a Better Education.” (From Professor Dockery)



