

Discovering the Student,

Discovering the Self

English 100 Student Essays
2019/2020 Edition



Missouri Western State University
Department of English and Modern Languages

Introduction

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The essays that appear in this publication were selected by the English 100 Committee from submissions from English 100 students from the Spring and Fall 2019 semesters. The criteria used to evaluate and select these essays included content, originality, a sense of discovery and insight on the part of the student writer, control of form, language and sentence construction and representation of the various types of assignments students are engaged in while in this course. ENG 100, Introduction to College Writing, is a developmental composition course designed for students who show signs of needing additional work on their college-level writing before starting the regular general education composition classes. In this course, students learn about and refine their writing process with a strong focus on the act of revision, engage in critical reading, thinking and writing and write both personal and text-based essays. ENG 100 prepares students for the rigors of college-level writing and introduces them to college expectations.

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

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English 100 – Introduction to College Writing
2019-2020

"My goal when writing this piece was originally to get the assignment done and over with. I didn't expect to enjoy this assignment or to learn new things about myself. As I was writing this essay, I noticed many similarities and differences that I shared with many of the people we read about. I could put myself in their shoes and I could take myself out of them. I developed a new goal during this assignment. My new goal wasn't to finish the essay and move on. My new goal was to share my story and my struggles. My new goal was to let my voice be heard and to get rid of the silence that almost seemed to choke me . . . I am no longer ink splattered across a blank page. I am a masterpiece painted along a canvas."

- Jasmine Kennedy

"The most challenging for me in writing was that I have to write my own story. I never expected myself to recall my story in details but this ended up rewarding me in freedom of my mind. I never thought that I would be able to forgive myself and people that hurt me . . . I would say that all of my writing assignments are healers. I got to let go of my emotional feelings toward my past. I remembered crying over my first paper about "Place" and angry over my third paper about, "The Abused Soul," but those were, somehow, my healing process."

- Orn-Phinyamars Seeaun

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Moments

in



Time

The Summer After

By Zailey Chambers

That shanty house, on the street you can't walk alone on in that city you can't escape, held my youth. In that house, I evolved from a naive girl into a defensive woman. A place where I could vanish from the world, a place with numerous memories and a place where I built myself. Although this was one physical place, to me it was an infinity of places. A place where the y protected me, a place where I hid from him, and a place where I matured: My House.

The house was a new start for me. We moved in when I was going to begin seventh grade. It had a distinctive smell of mothballs and mildew. The house wasn't lived in for five years after my great-grandparents moved out. When my great-grandparents lived there, we would have the most amazing times together. I remember the times when my cousins and I would all spend the night over there and wake up to the smell of cinnamon rolls in the morning. Another one of my favorite times would be Halloween because we would get so much candy, we would freak out. Now, that house was the first place I brought my new friends too. They didn't judge me about how the house was small or where it was located, which meant a lot to me. I also remember the time I would spend with my little brother when I had to babysit, it was best when my friends where over to help me. I admire the times when we would have a New Years get together and drink "our wine" which was sparkling juice. The house held so many important memories.

It was July twenty-sixth just a few weeks before school started back up again. My stomach ached from trying to hold in the laughter, for a second I forgot about him, but then remembered. I felt as though my body was a soda can, shaken up and ready to explode. I turn over to look at the time, its three- thirty in the morning. I glance at Kylie and Aleigha, just that glance made our outburst worse. It was the Summer of '15, the Summer we had spent together before the dreadful thought of high school. It was the Summer I spent with everyone who meant something so dearly to me. We sit on my bed in my cramped room, which smelled of a mixture of multiple fragrances of perfume and a hint of mothballs. You could almost smell the generations of past residents who lived there. On the floor you see thousands of random items, Jaden's sock, Kylies lip-gloss, Julianna's earrings, Macky's pants and Aleigha's phone charger. I remember that my mom nagged at me so much about cleaning that room, but I told her it was my own personal museum. We hush each other to not wake my mother, but we struggled because we couldn't handle the disease of laughter. That night I specify remember because they wanted to help me escape my mind set. They suggested that we become youtubers, so I grabbed my camera from the top of the dusty shelf in my ran down closet. Is it what's in the videos or is it the memory of what my friends helped me through during the Summer of '15?

His name is Blank I don't like the feeling of when his name rolls off my tongue. I don't know if I'm scared of letting you know or if I'm just scared of him in general. His name brings a knot to my stomach as if I'm in that same moment again. For months, that moment would replay itself. Every time I would try to come up with a way to fix it, I could have done something different. It was the last day of eight grade year, everyone was so excited for summer. The teachers had nothing planned so all we did was hang out and clean our lockers for the year. I sit at the brown sticky table in English class, the last class of the day. I write out my plans for the summer waiting for Kylie to get back from cleaning out her horrid mess of a locker. My phone vibrates, tell the teacher you need to go to the bathroom. I have a surprise for you. Meet me down the hall past the water fountain. That was the text from him, I had a million things

running through my head of what it could be. I was so nervous, my crush, had something for me. With my heart pounding and head over heels for him, I lied to teacher and started down the hall. glance back to make sure she wasn't there and I stopped to see Kylie. I leaned in close "He texted me and said to meet him, he said he had a surprise." She smiled and told me to hurry and that she would cover for me. I shuffle down the hall to see a tall figure lean up from getting a drink. The grin that stretched across his face now haunts my dreams. He gestured that I followed him, and even though I had an eerie feeling, I still did. Like a lost puppy, I followed him into the band room and it was dark. I turn around to see the light fade as the door closed and there was that grimace smile, stretched across his face. So dark.

After school I meet up with my friends and they seemed so happy, how could they be happy, can't they read the tragic look on my face? They talked about the plans for that night. I agreed to attend them but, in my head, I was saying no. Did I say no to him or was it all in my head? I started off back to my house, I felt tears rolling down my face and felt suffocated. I stop in front of the house and just stared at it. It was like it was looking back at me. The house seemed settled and unbothered until I stepped in. The wall looked as though they were going to come crumbling down. The house was trembling as if it was in fear of something. I slam my bag on the couch and storm straight into my room. The wall paper is peeling and the room is darkening. I crawl onto my bed and put my back up against the wall so nothing can get me from behind. For a second I just sit and stare, then the emotions fight out as if they wanted to be freed. Tears start to soak my shirt and I can't breathe; I am gasping for air as the house feels as though it is collapsing on me as if it was sad too. He broke me, he ruined my place he ruined everything for me. For years I looked at my place, the one I treasured so dearly, in disgust. The Summer After was ruined because all I could think about was him. My memories were destroyed, every second after him, I thought of him. I felt unsafe everywhere I went. My house was the one place I always felt comfortable, but with him in the back of my mind, my house was just like every other place. I remember a week after the incident, everything I did, he was there. In my bathroom, in my kitchen and in my bed. Everywhere became my worse nightmare. My house became my worst nightmare.

Four years passed. In that shanty house, on the street you can't walk alone on, in the city you can't escape, sat a woman. That woman was me. From fear, my mouth was sewn shut. It took me four years to accept the pain that he inflicted on me. For a while, I thought I would never get better. Yet, I did it. Morning after morning, he laughter I shared with my friends healed me. We spent countless nights gazing at the stars. We reminisced over our middle school years. I finally expressed what had happen to me to them. Before, we were too young to understand. Too young to know that I was raped. Me coming to this realization taught me to see myself for who I am, rather than an object he controlled. I know now that I am beautiful and strong. Just like that house. More and more memories started being made and with that I got better. I felt as if the house was getting better too, I felt safe again. I began to see it again as my place.

Afternoons at Eldon's

By Sophia Cordell

Throughout the years of 2011 to 2014, I spent almost every Friday with my Grandpa Eldon after school. I'd start walking home at around 3 p.m. and get there at 3:07 to find Grandpa sitting in his 2001 metallic blue Buick Regal with the windows rolled up and the AC on high. I was always smiling like an idiot because going over to his house always made my week ten times better. We'd get Dairy Queen, then sit down in our chairs and watch "Nick Toons" or "The Three Stooges" until Mom or Dad came by to pick me up at 5:30 or 6, and in a sense, going to Grandpa's house brought me comfort from my chaotic and stressful school and home life.

At the time, my life was spiraling out of control. My mom was pregnant with my baby brother and my teachers added to the stress of everything going on in my life. My fifth-grade homeroom teacher screamed at me in front of the entire class for not being able to finish my work after being out for a week with strep. She sent me to a second-grade classroom upstairs, and then told the students that they should do their work unless they wanted to end up like me. For the entire year I wasn't treated like a normal student; I was either always forced to write sentences or walk around the blacktop during recess, the only times I actually got to play with my friends was when my teacher was sick and didn't leave any notes for the sub. It was embarrassing and I felt like an idiot every day, not to mention treated like one, but even then, walking home after school and seeing Grandpa's smiling face somehow washed all my stress away, like it wasn't even there to begin with.

I always went up and knocked on his window to let him know I was going to put my stuff inside to which he'd respond with, "Got any homework?" then I'd put my backpack (and in 2012, my saxophone) in the back of his car, and then hopped in the front seat, buckled up, and went through the drive through at Dairy Queen. I'd usually get a large fry with two packets of salt and he'd get a plain cheeseburger with no lettuce and a packet of ketchup. After we got the food, we'd put the change we'd get in the console that had a little change holder for nickels, dimes, and quarters, and the pennies would go in the door handle.

Then we'd drive down South First Street, a very bumpy road, to the second house away from East Park Avenue. It was a beige house with a large pine tree in the middle of the yard surrounded by an even larger white painted tractor tire. On the right side of the house was a white garage door and on the left was a screen door that led to the living room. We'd park in the garage, get the food and my bag out of the back of the car, and as Grandpa shut the garage door, I pretended like it crushed and broke my feet, which he never believed. The garage always smelled like gasoline and grass since Grandpa mowed the lawn every morning. His lawn mower was a riding John Deere that always sat in back left corner of the garage, surrounded by other lawn supplies and tools he rarely used. To the right of that was a door that led to a small basement sort of shaped like a small hallway with half walls that led to storage space and easy access to the pipes and the water heater.

Back in the garage on the left wall was another door that led to a mini corridor with a coat closet in the middle of the wall right in front of you. The smell of the house was musty and old, but it didn't matter to me. I was just happy to be there. Shutting the door to the garage revealed the side door on the left wall that led back to the front yard. I was always the first one inside because Grandpa had arthritis in his knees and I was that kind of child. The kitchen was next to the garage door. It was small and cramped but still had enough space to walk around in.

There was a small wooden table next to the right wall where he'd eat his sausage and eggs in the morning. On the table top was an acrylic brown and yellow owl napkin holder with a salt and pepper shaker to the side of it. I'd get a Butterfinger out of the freezer, some chips out of the cabinet, and then head to the living room, passing the dining room along the way. I never usually went near the bedrooms in the hallway next to the living room because that's where Grandma passed away, and I was a very superstitious and paranoid child, who also believed in ghosts for no particular reason at all.

I'd put my bag next to the brown, floral couch that sat against the far-right wall, and sit in the darker brown square patterned chair next to the doorway, Grandma's chair, and Grandpa always sat in the chair to the left. I'd turn on the TV to watch Nick Toons, or as Grandpa always called them, "The Looney Tunes." which usually played *Planet Sheen*, *Mighty B*, *Kung Fu Panda: Legends of Awesomeness*, or *Avatar the Last Airbender*. While watching my shows, Grandpa would usually tell me about something Grandma used to do when she was still alive, usually ending it with expressing how stubborn she was and how much he missed her, and other times he'd ramble about something that's not the same "now-a-days." I never really listened to the end of his rambling because it'd usually somehow end up being racist. Once 5:30 rolled around, Mom would drop by to pick me up. I'd give Grandpa a hug, tell him I loved him, grab my backpack full of unfinished homework, and I'd head home to more stress and a small child waking me up at 2:30 a.m., crying and screaming about literally nothing because he was a baby.

There was always something to distract me from what was actually happening around me. After 2015 I slowly stopped going to his house, we'd still go by for a visit every once in a while, but it was nothing like before. His cane slowly transitioned into his walker, his knees got worse, and one day in early 2017 he fell down and stayed on the ground for a bit too long; he'd had a stroke. Soon after he was cleared from the hospital, he was transferred to La Verna Village. I was always too scared to see him, always too scared about what would happen next. I'd say I'd come back to see him soon, but I never kept my promise. Ironically, he passed at 7:45 Friday morning, March 3rd, 2017. I didn't get to say my last goodbyes, or tell him how much I loved him because I was in school learning about Henry the Eighth and all his dead wives.

Walking into my Grandpa's empty house after the estate sale was the worst feeling in the world. The acrylic owl was gone, and the chairs and sofa were by the side of the road waiting to be picked up by anyone, the T.V went to Goodwill, and the car went to me. Grandpa taught me that there was always a brighter side to things, sure my little brother might be incredibly annoying right now, but he'll grow up faster than the speed of light, and sooner or later, all we'll have is each other, and yes, school's hard now and nothing's going my way, but one day I'll get out of it and get a job I truly love doing because of the classes I took in college. He helped me when times were rough and always believed in me when no one else did. I get Dairy Queen by myself now, but I can always feel his presence with me, he doesn't want a cheese burger today because it'll hurt his teeth, but maybe next Friday he'll feel better. Eldon Ray Cordell will always be my special place.

Why wouldn't he put the bottle down?

By Tiera Fish

The presence of alcohol in the home that I grew up in always ended badly for everyone. My father could be all happy go lucky but the second that the liquor came out, my sister, brother and I just went outside because we knew what was going to start happening. It took the happiness out of our home. I would ask my mom if I could go play at the little park with the sunflowers behind our house, just so that I didn't have to be inside with him. When it would get dark I would have to come inside but normally if he was drinking and I had to be inside I would go out on our big screened in front porch or go to a room that he wasn't close to because I didn't want to be around him when someone offended him. If he was drunk he would get mean and offended very easily. I just didn't want to be around the negativity. Alcohol defines who I am as a person because I had to prove to myself that I would be more than the alcohol that tore my family apart.

My father was an Alcoholic when I was growing up. When my mother was 19 she had a daughter named Taryn. My father wasn't ready to grow up and be an adult so he chose to drink and hang out with friends and party and cheat on my mother. A year after my sister was born, my father had a son with another woman, his name is Dakota. My father wanted nothing to do with him. But, my mother made my father grow up and pay child support and go get Dakota so that my sister could know her brother and so that Dakota could know his sister. By the time I was born my father was a full blown alcoholic but, he was trying to grow up and be a dad. I was the only child that liked him. The rest of my siblings would just ignore him or go where he wasn't because they didn't like him. I wouldn't have known my brother if it wouldn't have been for my mother. She would go get him every weekend so that my sister and I could see him. My sister and I loved our brother, but our father hated him. My father always said our brother was a mistake. He should have just left him as a thought. My father always said, "I knew his mother was going to be a problem the first time I screwed her, he is a problem just like her." He treated him terribly but I was only a child so, I didn't know that how he was treating him was bad until he would get mad and start throwing things. He would throw things at our head to get us to leave him alone. He would throw plates when we wouldn't eat. He always scared us.

I grew up without a father to admire. My father worked at an old beat up pig farm, it had old rusty fencing and rotting wood. When my father would take me to work with him it smelt like a lagoon, I could almost taste rotten eggs. He worked early morning to mid-afternoon. He would come home and take a nap. Then, would get up and start drinking. My father's buddies were usually there in the late afternoon or early evening and they would drink until late night or early morning. As James Baldwin said, "I do not remember, in all those years, that one of his children was ever glad to see him come home." ("The Native Son"). What Baldwin felt, I can understand, my father was not a person I wanted to see at home very often. When my father would get home from partying with his friends he would eat something and go to sleep and do it all over again the next day. I always wanted to play catch or play basketball but he was always too drunk to spend time with his kids. He always chose the bottle over my siblings and I. I tried over and over to forgive him but he always just kept letting me down. I played softball, basketball, and soccer. I would tell him when all my games were. He would promise to be there

and then he would not show up. He would say, "Something came up, I'm sorry, I'll be at the next one." He said that for every game. I figured out that my mother was covering up for him because I was the only child that would even tolerate him. I would talk to him, even though he let me down. I would still go to his house, even though he ignored my calls for weeks at a time. So, my mother didn't want this to ruin my image of my father. I told her that she needed to stop covering for him. That was the last time I trusted my father.

Alcohol drove my family apart. My mother gave him chance after chance after chance to stop drinking. He chose the bottle over his family. He chose to get drunk every day and night instead of spending time with his kids. He wanted us to go to our grandma and grandpa's house so that he could drink with his friends. He would take money from my mom and buy alcohol with it instead of buying groceries. My mom gave up with dealing with his lies and childish acts. After thirteen years of marriage she finally left him. My mom called some close family members to come help pack his things. They showed up and helped my mother pack up all of his belongings. My mother also packed some groceries, cleaning supplies, plates, silverware. My mom found a nice trailer for him. It was a three bedroom one bathroom. It had a huge yard with flower beds that had a lot of glowing red roses and yellow tulips growing in them. It was surrounded by corn fields. It was very nice, peaceful. My mother and my family took all of my father's items to his new trailer. When he showed up one night drunk and the locks had been changed. He was confused with what was going. When my mom gave him the address of his new house and said she filed for a divorce and that she was done. She told him that she was tired of his childish ways and that she wanted a better life for her and her children. She told him that she had gotten him a nice trailer and all of his belongings were there. He just said, "Okay!" Then he left. He didn't even argue.

Alcohol made me grow up at a young age. After my mother and father got a divorce it was a struggle. My mom decided about a year after they got divorced that she wanted to go back to school to get her MA (Medical Assistant) degree. My sister was fourteen years old and I was eight years old. My mother had to be on her way to class by 6am every day because she had class at 8am and she had an hour drive. Every morning my grandma would wake up and come to our house to make sure we were up and make us some breakfast and make sure that our homework was done. She would drive us to school. After school we would ride the bus home. My sister and I would do homework and take out the animals and do our chores. Then, it was time to shower and eat dinner. Normally, my mother was home in enough time to cook dinner. While she was eating she would do homework. When we all got done eating I would do the dishes and my sister would dry them off. My mother would check our homework and sign our planners for school. Finally, around 9pm my sister and I would go to bed and she would stay up till midnight doing homework. My mother also worked three full time jobs. She went to school from 8am to noon. She would leave there and go to work from 12:30 till 6pm. She did that Monday through Friday. On the weekends she would work 6am to 3pm at one job then go to the other one from 4pm to 2am. She was a hard worker. I hope to be that strong as a person one day because my mom was in school and my father was a drunk, she had no help and still managed to make everything work out. We went to our father's house every other weekend, but normally he would call our mother and say that he was busy that he didn't want us that weekend. Luckily my mother had a lot of people willing to help her out with my sister and I. My sister, brother, and I had to accept that our father didn't exactly want us. That hurt, it hurt a lot. But, we have all grown from that. I have grown from that. I have become a better student and daughter. I have learned a lot more

responsibility. I am very proud of myself. To say this is something that I am extremely proud of. I hope to succeed greater success one day and show him that nothing can tear me down.

Small Town Family

By Emalie Gerding

Family is such a simple word, with such a strong meaning. You can have a big family with dozens of cousins, multiple aunts, and uncles. You can have your grandparents, mom, dad, and siblings. Even though it is small, it is still a family. The town where you grew up in can be your family. For me, it was a town. The little town of New Canton, Illinois, with a population of less than five hundred. Many places in this town mean the world to me. There are traditions like the New Canton Harvest Festival, where the Methodist church had a stand of freshly baked goods, packaged in zip lock bags for a steal. Additionally, there was a stand with birthstone rings, temporary tattoos, and slime in a tube. They also had a petting zoo every year with camels who liked to eat shirts. I remember one year a camel decided to eat my brother's shirt. Everything that has happened in that little town has taught me that family can be anything, and that a place can shape and mold who you are. In my little town those places where my house, my grandparents' house, and the church. They taught me how to be an adult, what healthy relationships look like, and my morals.

My brothers, mom, and I lived in this one story white house with a porch and a sunroom. It was two blocks to the right from my grandparent's house and on the way to their house you would run into my aunt's house. She lived a block from my grandparents in a little white house that also had a sunroom. On the left, about two blocks away, my other aunt and my two cousins lived. Kaylin who is sixteen hours older than me and Hannah who is a year younger than me lived in the biggest house out of all of us. Their house was a big two-story townhouse. Kaylin and Hannah shared a room. They had a bed on each side of the room with a walk-in closet right next to their bedroom. We used to go there and play dress up all the time. We would have little fashion shows, walking down the long hallway that led up to their room and closet. I loved my home, but with my mom working 2 hours away if never really felt as if I was home.

Being so close to my grandparents, my brothers and I would walk over to the pink rectangular house with the green roof every Friday after school. Their house was like my second house and still is and always will be. My grandma was such a good cook, that's what I always look forward to. They wouldn't be back from work when we got there, but they always left it unlocked so we could get in. When they finally got home, my grandma would put her stuff down and clean up the dishes from that morning. My grandma would never cook supper until the kitchen was cleaned up and the dishes were all clean and put away. My grandparents grew up in a time when the women cooked and the men would do the labor and yard work. They still are that way. My grandma cooks and my grandpa and now my brother do the yard work. So after my grandma would get the kitchen cleaned, she would start supper. I would pull up my stool, climb on it, and watch in amazement. The older I got, the more she would let me do. Now I'm at the point where I can make supper while she's at work. So when she comes home it is ready, and she doesn't have to do anything. We would get everything on the table and yell at my grandpa because he can't hear when supper was ready. We would sit down, eat supper, and tell each other how our day went. Then Saturday morning came around. We would wake up to the smell of bacon frying in a skillet, pans clashing, and occasionally my grandparents bickering about something. I would walk out into the kitchen from the guest room, which is covered with green paint, a blue cabinet separating the beds, and a silver box tv that stands on a wobbly, wooden stand. The floors creaking with every step.

The kitchen was covered with pistachio green cabinets, linoleum countertops, and a diamond design tile on the floor. I would be greeted by my grandma with “Good Morning, What do you want to drink?” I would tell her what I want to drink, which was usually orange juice. She would go back to frying bacon in a skillet that sat on an old glass top stove, which is still in really good shape. While my grandma cooked the bacon, my grandpa was working on his world-famous pancakes, which were only famous in our family. By the time my grandma was done with the bacon, my grandpa was ready to fry up the pancakes in the bacon grease. When it was ready and the pancakes were piled high on a plate, we would pass it around the table and get what we wanted. My grandpa had his four and he would spread peanut butter on them and then pour white corn syrup on top. He would then proceed to put it in the microwave and heat it up. Nekoda would do the same as my grandpa. Jacob, on the other hand, went a different route. He would put butter, powdered sugar, and chocolate syrup all over his pancakes. Then my grandma would tell him, “that's too much sugar”. My grandma was trying to watch her figure, so she would put two pancakes on her plate, put some butter on them, stack them up, and pour sugar-free syrup on them. It was simple when it came to mine. I would put butter and powdered sugar and that's it. Watching how my grandparents ran their house showed me what to do when I had my own family. It taught me how to be an adult, how to cook, and clean, all the basic skills in life.

Church and religion is a big foundation of our family. My grandparents passed on the morals they learned as kids to their kids, and now us. My grandma was raised in a church and so were her parents. My grandpa, on the other hand, wasn't raised in a church. He lived with an alcoholic father and Methodist mother. My grandpa used to have to go to the town bar and pick his dad up because he was too drunk to stand up. My grandparents went to different high schools, but even if they didn't, they would have never talked to each other. My grandma was a cheerleader and my grandpa was a troublemaker. They didn't talk to my grandma was leaving for college and my grandpa offered her a ride. After that my grandpa went to church more just to see my grandma, where they eventually fell in love and got married. They stayed in the same little town that they grew up in, where my mom and aunts grew up in, and I grew up in. Since then my grandparents were avid churchgoers, which meant so were we. They helped build the church we went to, and it was a little over a block from their house. There was this old run-down house right next to the church, that's where my grandma taught her Sunday school class. My grandpa taught the adults in the church where my grandma taught children's church. The big wooden french doors led you to the sanctuary, where there were blue chairs on either side and a sound booth to the left when you walked in. The big stage with a big cross hanging on the wall where the pastor would preach and worship and everyone would worship with him.. After the service was done my grandparents, being who they are, would be the last ones out of the building. They would either be talking to everyone or trying to get all of their stuff together. Then we would head back to their house, my grandma would fix lunch, and we would set the table. We would gossip about people at church or people in town. My faith and religion came from what my grandparents taught me, and what I was taught in that little small town church. If I wasn't home or at my grandparents I was in that church, learning and growing.

That's what it was like growing up in a small town with a big family. The little town that I always knew was home, was the place with all the memories and love. The walk to my grandparents, Saturday mornings eating pancakes, and all the buildings that hold those memories. Made me believe in who I am today, taught me that family can be anything, and

showed me that I am lucky to have the family and town I have.

Kenzie and The Blossom Tree

By Jordan Heard

When I was young, for the holidays, family members would always give me a lot of journals. I didn't want journal I wanted sketch books and fancy writing utensils because I had no need of a journal. I already had the greatest journal and best friend imaginable: the blossom tree that grew right beside our house. It made me feel safe from the anxiety of talking to strangers. This tree, over the years, had given me the gift of a life-long best friend.

When I was a young child I lived most of my life in a small town, with the stereotype that the whole town knew what any given person was doing all the time. I lived in a small, one story, white house on the outskirts of town. The house had a medium sized, red, wooden shed in the back yard that was in desperate need of a paint job. Also in the backyard was a giant trampoline with a broken, saggy, poor excuse for a safety net. The front yard was not much better, but we had a mailbox that was upright and a bed of flowers up against the house. An oak wood deck was branched offside the back door that stood next to the best part of the entire house. The single greatest part of living in that house was the old blossom tree. This was my journal, this tree got me through my childhood.

It's surprising at how much trust can come in one tree, but I never could stay away from it. The winters would come and go, but there would always be a billion tiny snowmen and decorations surrounding the old tree. In the spring, flowers bloom on the tree, and the summer and fall would bring extravagant rains of petals as all the blossoms fell from the previous season.

When fall came then school was starting back up. As a 7 year old child I was never a very talkative person, but the blossom tree was a resource that I had used frequently to talk about my day. I would go home and have the usual confrontation with my parents about "How was school today?" My answer was always "Ehh, it was fine" and I would go on about my business. Some way or another I would find my way outside to sit in front of the tree where nobody could see me from the house. I would tell the tree about my day, the hardships that had been brought upon me, and how unsuccessful I was at making new friends. Then, the year of 2007, a family moved in next door that had a girl that was my age and in my class. I told my tree everyday when I came home from school that I was going to make her my friend someday. Talking to the tree made me feel safe from the world and gave me a sense of hope that I would make friends the next day.

When I was about 8 years old, one year after the new neighbors moved in, I was sitting by my tree telling it about my day, when the girl came over and asked me what I was doing. I told her I was telling my journal about my day at school and how I had another unsuccessful day at making friends. The girl sat down next to me and told me her name was McKenzie, but I could call her Kenzie for short. She looked at the tree and asked me why I talked to the tree. I told her that it was the only friend I had at the moment that I could really trust. Kenzie looked at the tree again and said out loud, "Hello, Tree my name is Kenzie and I want to be Jordan's friend." Almost like clockwork, the wind picked up and was blowing the leaves and flowers around. I was mind blown that this new neighbor girl was asking the tree if it accepted her as my friend. It was as if the tree was saying "Yes, you may indeed be Jordan's friend." The coincidence of it all was that day I had convinced myself that she would be my friend, but I had to find the right way to talk to her. From that day forward, Kenzie and I became best friends and still are to this day. We are always on each other's side and have each others back. The experience that we had at the tree that day bonded us together and made for many more adventures to be had in the

years to come. We help each other and give one another advice on relationships.

In the last 10 years leading up to now, others and myself have seen a significant change in my personality because of Kenzie and the blossom tree. I have been more socially active and also have learned that making new friends is not as scary or hard as it used to be. After I began college, a new family moved into my old house and cut down the tree. When I heard the news I thought back to the many games that Kenzie and I played around the tree and was thankful that in most of them was where I found my self confidence. Losing the tree was devastating, but I thought about all the good times I had and decided that is was a sign from my Old Blossom Tree that I am not the antisocial little girl I used to be and that I do not need it to feel stable in who I am becoming. Confidence is hiding within us all, but sometimes we need a little help from our friends to find it.

Bulletproof

By Jay Jensik Jr.

I'm not bulletproof but with the right people by my side, I can be. Being shot at and surviving is not what makes a person bulletproof. Being bulletproof is a state of mind that as long as the situation is right nothing can hurt them. Nothing can come between them and what they love and the places they love and remember. To be bulletproof, I remember the places like the front lawn where I was traumatized, the hospital where I recovered from an injury, a foster home void of the people I had been used to or even the arms of my mother who risked her life trying to save mine, and I never felt alone.

I didn't understand at the time what exactly what would happen this day in Raytown on 51st street. I know now it turned out to be a nightmare. Tall grass poked through the spaces of my toes. First base with one out, I just kicked my sister onto second. The smell of BBQ chicken in the air fills my nose as dad steps up to the plate. Looking around, I could see my whole immediate family happy and enjoying life. I see half my brothers in the yard playing defense. The other half waits for their turn at the plate, sitting on the brick wall with the smell of chicken mixed with the smell of weed. Although I hated drugs, my brothers were in the business of drugs and everything that comes with it. Sweat ran off my face; I prepared for the pitch with hope in my eyes my sister could get on base. Suddenly everything stopped. Ears ringing like someone let off a bomb two feet away, the sight of everyone scatter and noise of yelling. I saw my brother who fell over the brick wall onto our gravel driveway. I could see everyone that was screaming but only hear my mother. She was running to me with my sister in her hands. I was paralyzed with fear because of the look in my mother's eyes.

Stuck in place in the middle of our front lawn, I felt like I was being possessed by the look of my mother running towards me. I hear it now, gunshots that seemed to never end. My mom fell onto me tackling me to the ground. The only thing louder than the gunshots was the sound of my mom crying in my ear. She saw it, she saw me get hit. Crying with the fear that her youngest son's life could be taken from her, she cradled my whole body. The gunshots stopped and the blood from the two gunshot wounds she suffered on her upper and lower back stained both of our shirts. She dragged me behind the brick wall that lined our driveway. I didn't feel anything since I was still frozen in fear. I saw my brother run into the side door of our house with blood on his shirt and I cried. That is the last moment I remember of 51st Street before waking up in the ambulance with strangers putting pressure on my body demanding me to remain calm.

I felt all the weight this man could ever give on my groin. I was in agonizing pain. My mother, and my two brothers and I were shot. My mom was shot twice along with my oldest brother, while my middle brother and I where only shot once. The doctor is the one that told me what had happened. After waking from surgery, I was good to walk and go see my mom in her room. She told me she would lose me and that I would then be going into a foster care system. She said she can only get me back when she is done with her "classes." This hospital was an important place to me, I can remember every word my mom said in the hospital. The new feeling of safety overwhelmed my body. I do not remember the surgery. Father told me not to worry about it and I listened. Surgery did go well although walking was not as fun as it used to be. I had strange socks on with sticky rubber on the bottom. I didn't like the socks so I took them off. The striking cold of the hospital tile floors struck me like I was walking on snow. I talked

with my mother in her bed for the next two days and one night that I was there. We never spoke about what happened that night. When my mother told me she would lose me and she couldn't tell me how long, this crushed me. She told me to never end up like my brothers and to never go down the wrong path or this would happen again. The fear of losing my mom would give me enough power to follow her orders. I can't remember a single nurse that helped me there; I can't even remember the doctor that pulled the bullet out of my groin. I can remember every word my mom said in that room, the exact layout of the hospital room she was in, and the channels that played on the TV. They also served us terrible food so my dad would sneak in McDonalds for us to eat instead. I don't remember the name of this hospital or where it is located. However, I will never forget the feeling in my heart seeing my mom in pain on that hospital bed.

I was not afraid of going into foster care and my mom made sure of that in the last night of me staying in the hospital with her. She made it blatantly clear she would get me back when everything got cleaned up. She said I would get separated from my sisters just so they could put them in a home with kids their age. I was excited yet worried that I would become homesick for my big family. To make me feel better, she told me she would take me to meet my foster mom. She would say that a foster mom meant a person that's acting like my mom until she can get me back kind of like I'm going undercover. I never was worried after this. I had full belief as I laid down in the hospital bed with her counting the ceiling tiles that we would soon be reunited with her. In her arms I felt safe and at home, it was never the house or the yard it was my mom. My mother would hold me when I was worried and I never had to run from her since she kept me from everything evil.

In the foster home, it was the absence of family that stuck with me. The feeling that my true mother wasn't here and she wouldn't be here for a long time. I can remember Momma Bush's house better than my own. As soon as you walk in, you were hit with the strong smell of cigarettes. She had creaking hardwood floors and old dusty green furniture that littered throughout the house. Momma Bush would always lay on the love seat sideways watching Family Feud. She would scream her answers out as if Steve Harvy was going to jump out of the TV and give her money. Up the stairs you could hear the crackling of the wood under your feet. "The boy's room", as momma Bush called it, was up there. We shared two rooms with a bathroom in the middle with two people per room. Going up those stairs you would be greeted with the smell of sweat and dedication. Video game dedication. I can remember this house so well not only because I had great memories there with my new family, but for the memories I didn't get to make with my real one. It was the absence of family that stuck with me. The feeling that my true mother wasn't here and she wouldn't be here for a long time.

I was blessed to have the foster family and home that I had. A great foster mom named Raynisha Bush, a great woman who treated me like I was her own. She had other foster kids that were not hers and some who were. I was the only one there that knew who my real mother was. The other boys would always guess who Momma Bush's real kids are. When asked, she would hug us all and say, "You are all my kids right now and I love you all the same." I was the only white child in the house and when she would say that, she held me close with her other boys and I knew that she truly meant it.

Three years later, I was twelve years old and only saw my mom through Facetime calls and Skype. I loved my foster home. The family was great, but it was not home. Countless days of laying in bed feeling my scar on my groin as I looked at the top bunk where my foster brother slept, who would become my college roommate. I thought of the only place I have ever called

home. I can remember the feeling when my foster mom took me to my mom's new apartment she had been staying at. The feeling of my heart throbbing that I would finally get to hug her and be with her again. I was even thinking about finishing that kickball game. My foster mother was holding my hand tight telling me to stand upright when I see her and make sure I thank her for what she had done. I was going to hold my mom as tight as she held me that afternoon with bullets in her back protecting me and my little sister. I wanted her to know I still loved her more. I was walking down the block towards her place worried that she would think I did not grow enough or that I didn't make the best grades while I was gone. However, all worry left my body when I saw her. I ran the fastest I have ever ran in my life about forty feet until I slowed down to hug her. I remember the lavender smell she always smelled like and the shampoo she always used. Smells I had been deprived of when I was away, but I was home now in her arms with my mom where I should be. She whispered in my ear while I was embracing her she said, "I will never lose you again do you understand me" I told her snibbling with tears in my eyes "yes mom, I love you."

This moment in my life of being back in my mother's hands brought strange feelings to me. It made me remember the shooting, the house, the yard, and that street. The only street I had ever known the name of at that age and the only yard where I knew every peak and valley, every bump, and every divit. The strange yellow house with the light gray gravel driveway. Now all I can remember is the red from my mother's blood that stained my shirt and the screams of my family as bullets flew threw the air. If I try really hard, I can still smell the chicken on the rusty red grill. I can still think about when the house didn't have bullet holes. The Janko tree in the front would shed its leaves in the fall and it left leaf piles that we would jump through. I also remember all the photos my mom took of us, all the love she gave me there, my sister on second base with one out, and dad up to bat. I can remember more of the good than the bad 51st Street was good to me and the bad was not going to change that.

At the end of my life, I will forget more than I remember but I will never forget the look of my mom's face running toward me to try her hardest to save my life in that front lawn. I will never forget the talk I had with her in the hospital bed, the cold hospital floors, and the terrible food. I will never forget the talks we had on Skype dreaming about the days where I would get to see her in person again. I will remember the amazing time I had with my new family and the house we lived in especially when Momma Bush laughed and screamed at the TV while smoking a cigarette. Most of all, I will never forget the feeling I felt when I was reunited with my mom and the feeling of being home. I remember seeing all of my brothers when they got out of jail. They all surrounded me telling me I'm superman and that I'm bulletproof. I have never felt alone ever since. My place is with my mom even if that's in the front yard of our house with bullet wounds, or if that's the hospital recovering from those same wounds. My time away from her at the foster home will be remembered because of her absence. Family is home; 51st Street is just my house, St Luke's Hospital is just a hospital, 32nd and Troost is where my foster mom lives to this day, is just a house. It's the meaning behind these places that makes them great to me.

What made me? By Shaunte Lanham

What made me the mother I am today? Was it the struggles and milestones, the strength and endurance I've learned, or maybe even the love that keeps the dark days light as motherhood never ends? For me it was adapting to life, being ambitious to grow, never giving up and my I can attitude.

Before I had children, my life was very content, not hard, but during my first pregnancy I learned how to adapt. I lived in Cheyenne, Wyoming born and raised. I was working as a CNA, going to school, and was in what I thought to be the perfect relationship. One day, near the end of March beginning of April 2010, I hadn't felt well; I was very nauseated, moody, and to top it all off, I was late. I decided to get an at home pregnancy test. I headed to my best friend's house and peed on the stick for the first time ever in my life. After waiting for what seemed to be the longest few minutes in my life, I walked back into the bathroom, and BOOM, BANG, BAM the test had a positive and negative sign. This meant it was a positive test. I was now pregnant, barely half way into eighteen years old, and barely able to help myself. All I could do was cry and weep. How could this happen, and why right now? In my mind I was done for. Everything I knew was now changing right before my eyes. When I broke the news to my boyfriend, at the time, the whole relationship changed for the worst. As the days got longer, and the months seemed to go slower, my relationship with the father of my unborn child had now fallen. I was homeless, jobless, and carless. I was being asked to withdraw from college, and I was emotionally drained. My best friend moved me in, helped me get a job, get a car, and apply for some apartments. Things were looking up. Then just when I thought I had it all figured out, something changed. The four main people who had taught me everything, were passing one by one, and one right after the other. Within three to four months of each other, I had lost two grandpas, an uncle, and an aunt, all while I was pregnant. All the people that would be lights in our lives to help guide me, were now gone, and all I had was my unborn child. I continued to work, trying to grow, and learning to adapt to everything that was changing. I found out I would be raising a little boy by myself as a single mother. How would I teach him to pee, treat women, or just to be a boy? On December 6th, 2010 my son Romeo Anthony Stephen Lanham was born. All of my pain and suffering that had led to that moment was all becoming real. Was I going to love him, be able to take care of him, or even manage all this forever? Then BOOM there's a head; "keep pushing," the doctor said. There he was on my chest, this little boy I created, and a feeling I could never explain. Finally, I had made it to my due date. In the back of my mind, I couldn't fathom the fact that some little human was about to depend on me, need me, and expect to be taken care of. At that moment I knew I had to step up to the plate and teach this little boy the way of life. All of my struggles that had led up to my son's birth had shaped me into being a mother. I still couldn't believe that I was able to adapt just like that. I had a little person watching me, as I watched him grow over the next couple of years. He learned from me, and I learned to adapt to being his mother each day. Every day as he got older, I was learning to adapt. No day was the same. With no day the same, adapting was becoming easier.

As the years passed, I became ambitious to grow. As time went on, a rekindle in my fire was repeated. Romeo's father had come back around, and we were going to try to make our family work. I was now working as a bartender, raising my son, and back with my son's dad. For months it was good again, I thought, not realizing his addictions, or the interest he had in my

materialistic things. On March 8th, 2014 while at work, I got a phone call telling me my brother had passed.” At that time the only person there for me in this dark time, was my son’s father. By the end of April beginning of May he’d got locked up. A month or so later, I sent my son to my mom’s to visit and get my head right again. I decided to just go get a standard check-up with my doctor. The Doc comes back and says, “You’re pregnant; congrats on number two!” I looked at the doc and said, “You’re kidding right?” I had gone back to a bad relationship to find out I was on number two, and I’d be raising this unborn child by myself again. I headed up to the jail to tell him that I was pregnant again, and I find another woman sitting there. In rage I walk over to the woman as she’s talking through the glass at him. I just stand there glaring. In that instant all I could do was cry and weep out, “I’m expecting again!” His response was, “So is she,” and “Are you sure it’s mine?” All I could do was run out in a hurry, so I didn’t end up in jail with him for snapping out. I went to his mom’s job, hoping to get a different reaction, I guess. As I sat there crying, informing her she would be a grandma again, she tells me, “I don’t think it’s a good time. Maybe think about an abortion.” My heart sank, like someone had just ripped it out of my chest. Why did I expect anything to change or be different? Why did I think that anyone was going to help me with a second child, when they barely helped with my son? I left, headed home, and at that point, I knew that I was going to give myself a better lifestyle than what I had surrounded my son and I with already. I became ambitious to get away from toxic people in my life and to make a change. I decided I was going to move to Plattsburg, Missouri where my parents resided and start a new life. I packed up everything I could fit in a 17ft U-Haul, dragging my car behind on a dolly. Two weeks later on June 6, I was on the road to Missouri to do what I wanted in life.

Once there, I had two jobs in the first week of moving and was working crazy hours. I was already five months along and had found out I was having a girl. I had moved into my first apartment in Missouri about September of 2014. On December 3rd, 2014 my daughter Jakyla Valentina Lanee Lanham was born. I was now a single mother of two kids, in a new state, new people, and with little help. I was going to do this; I was going to give these two beautiful gifts of mine a good life by myself. I was ambitious to go back to work. Working side jobs for money, until I was released from maternity to go back to work. Once back to work, I was working three to four jobs at a time to be able to live without child support or help from my children’s father. I was raising these two children of mine and working multiple jobs. I kept telling myself, “You work all these hours, all these places, different times, why can’t you just go back to school?” My excuse was always because I had my youngest at home still. I told myself once Jakyla went to school there was no more excuses. I became more ambitious to be able to work one job to support my family, help others, and better myself as a mother, a woman, and a friend. As I continued to grow each day for my children and myself, my ambition was stronger than ever. My ambition for my kids will always drive me.

Finally, as life changed, through the good and bad, I never gave up. As time passed my daughter had hit the age where she could go to school. I now had an 8-year-old, and a 4-year-old both ready to go to school starting back in August 2018. That summer of 2018 I decided to go back to school, no more excuses. I could go to class while the kids were away at school themselves. Fall semester I went back to school after ten years. The first week I was in over my head, and I had to drop a class. Not what I needed. In my head I kept asking myself, “What are you doing, you can’t juggle all these things?” I was working five jobs, going to school as a fulltime student, and still being a mother. I had started doubting myself again, and I felt like I was failing in life, like I had no plans or goals, just there floating. Then a week before finals, I

hadn't felt well. To top it off, I was a day late again. I grabbed an at home test and again peed on the stick. Not even a minute later BOOM, BANG, BAM, it's a positive and negative sign again. Now number three was on the way. At first, I couldn't say anything, just speechless. I had just after eight years been able to stop making excuses as to why I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I now had one, two, and three on the way. I was lost. I called my boyfriend up and told him. What I expected his response to be was, a complete opposite. He was excited, and I had gotten a reaction I wasn't ready for. My life began to look up; I had gotten through all of my classes, and I was on to the next semester. As the next month went on, I was debating on another semester right now. I sat down with my boyfriend contemplating different outcomes, solutions, and paths. It was decided I was going back to school, so onto the next semester. Through all these struggles I was learning that I could do anything I had set my mind too. I had already overcome so much more and had come a very long way from eight to nine years ago, even just four years ago. I was in a healthy relationship with baby three on the way. I was in school, still working, and becoming a better person every day. I had accomplished so much in my life along this road of life, but more on the road of motherhood. Nothing will stop me, if I had a say so. For as long as I never gave up on myself, I could do anything I set my mind too. The only person that could stop me from success, was myself.

From one, two, and three on the way, I've learned to adapt to anything life throws at me. I had continued to grow in life, my ambition was strong, and I wasn't giving up. Every day was a new day and a fresh start. Finally, through it all, anything I had set my mind to, I had accomplished. My kids are my sunshine through it all. With my kids watching me, watch them, and my I can, and I will attitude, I would be able to adapt to anything, continue to have ambition, and never give up.

Peace and Companionship

By Tori McIntire

Growing up, Jose's house was more of a home to me than my own house was. Most people love to get home at the end of the day and enjoy the comfort of their own space but I always preferred Jose's house. At my house, I did not feel welcome and, at times, I felt like I needed to get away from that hostile environment. Jose's house was a place of peace and companionship. His family was warm and friendly. There were always family friends there to hang out and talk together or eat together. I felt more welcome there than I ever felt at home.

My house wasn't always so bad. I do have happy memories there from when I was a little kid. Sunlight came through the big front window into the clean living room. I sat on the squishy blue couch during the day and watched kids shows. Things were relatively normal until I was around five years old. That was when my mom started drinking all the time. My mom always drank on the weekends but once I started school she began drinking almost daily. A few times, when I was around six or seven, she came home drunk at the end of the night and screamed and threw things at my dad. I usually sat in a corner and watched as she hit and pushed him until he would finally push her back, and give her a reason to call the cops, who would just Baker Act her. I didn't realize that she would do those things to my brother and me when we got older. By the time I was a teenager, she was constantly looking for something to fight with me about the way she used to with my dad. I spent as little time there as I could. I needed a peaceful place to get away from my mom's house and Jose's house was the ideal place to go.

Jose's house was where I went when I didn't feel wanted by my family. One of the first things I remember was the large side porch at the end of the cracked driveway. It was bricked in on two sides and felt safe and sturdy. His house was on a corner and we had a clear view of the street where we played basketball and football together. I could always hear Jose's loud laugh as I walked up his driveway. Karvas and Danny were there, playing cards at a glass table. They were three of the best friends I've ever had. On hot summer days the porch was shaded and breezy and there was a cooler full of soda and Gatorade in the back corner by the door. I unfolded an extra metal chair and sat at the table with them. Smoke filled the air from the cigarette hanging out of Danny's mouth. I grabbed a soda and pulled a cigarette out of the pack on the table. We always shared what we had. "Deal me in", I said. We were all competitive and could play cards for hours as long as someone different won each round. The guys talked about football practice and we told jokes. The smell of smoke and the sounds of their voices and laughter was calming. Sitting around the table with them made me feel like I was accepted. At Jose's house there was always an extra seat for anyone who wanted to hang out on the porch.

Inside Jose's house I felt hidden away from the world. I often went in Jose's house because it meant my family didn't know where I was. Jose's family hardly ever answered the door so I often just wandered in, letting the metal door creak and slam behind me. They were the type of trusting people that hardly locked their door. They just assumed you meant them well when you crossed the threshold. I walked straight back through the living room to Jose's small, dark bedroom. Dark blankets covered the windows and his collection of blue and white Orlando Magic memorabilia lined the walls on shelves. Along with the blueish light from the T.V., the room felt calm and hidden. I threw myself on his bed and watched him play video games on his X-Box. After a while we went to his big, messy kitchen to make breakfast. Even though it was late in the day, we always made breakfast food. Jose's had a big family that loved

to cook so there was always used dishes in the sink and a smell of hot food. There was black board on one wall where his family wrote messages to each other and kept a shopping list. I loved to see “I love you!” messages between his sisters. Jose and I always made French toast and eggs and put cereal in our milk cups. Then we went back to his room to eat together and watch *Adventure Time* on his T.V. Sometimes when we watched *Adventure Time* I felt like I was the Flame Princess and I accidently destroyed everything I touched. That was how I always felt at my house anyway, but at Jose’s house it was like I didn’t exist. I could hide behind the dark blankets, seen only by the light of the T.V. and eat my French toast. I was warm, safe, and full.

The shed behind Jose’s house was probably the most memorable part of his house to me. I remember when I first started living there when I was 17. I had come home from hanging out with friends a little late. I was supposed to be home before the street lights came on. When I got to my mom’s house the door opened to her flaming red hair. Her green irises swimming in pools of red. She was drunk again and started yelling at me before I was even in the door. She accused me of everything. She said I was high, that I was a whore because I was out with guys all day, she even accused me of stealing from her. I was really tired of it and I knew she didn’t want me there any more than I wanted to be there. I decided I’d had enough that night so I grabbed two things out of my bedside drawer and left. I went back to the shed where I had been hanging out with Karvas and Jose that evening. The shed was a small wooden building between Jose’s house and a privacy fence. It was under a huge avocado tree and you had to go through the gate to Jose’s back yard to get to it, giving it a feeling of seclusion. Jose and Karvas were still there sitting at the small table in the back corner, next to a hammock that hung from the ceiling. We had run an extension cord from Jose’s house to power a radio and a small fan. I pulled the two items out of my pocket, a pack of white grape White Owls and a bag of weed, and sat at the table. I rolled one blunt, lit it and climbed into the hammock. I passed the blunt to Jose and Karvas sat at the table and started rolling the second one. I tried to relax for a while. I laid in the hammock, not really swinging, watching the smoke rise toward the ceiling of the shed. It twisted through the slight glow of the candles flame and the blue light from the radio. Wiz Khalifa’s “Up” was playing slow and melancholy. I didn’t plan on going home that night. I could still feel tears burning at my eyes, trying to escape. I wouldn’t let that happen. I covered the burning in my eyes with a burning in my throat. “Pass the blunt,” I said to Karvas. His dark eyes caught the blue light as he reached up to pass me it. “God, he’s gorgeous,” I thought and I took a long drag tasting the white grape White Owl I had used to wrap it. I tried to exhale my worries with the smoke. For a couple hours, I forgot about my mom and her constant yelling. I listened to Karvas and Jose, my two best friends, talk and jest. I lied there in the warm hammock and floated away on the music. To me this was home.

I was welcome at Jose’s house when my own family didn’t want me around. It was a place where friends could come together and enjoy each other’s company over video games or a game of cards. I didn’t know it then, but looking back, the times I spent at Jose’s house were some of the best times of my life. I miss playing cards or basketball with everyone. Sometimes I wish I could go back to those times in his room when I didn’t exist and I had nothing to worry about. It was a place of friends and had a sense of togetherness I only hope I’ll be able to replicate again someday. I was fortunate to have an escape from my toxic house, to a place that felt more like a home and with friends who felt more like family. I am thankful to Jose’s family for letting me hang around so much. I will always value those friendships and what that house meant to me.

Code Blue

Shamarla Pointer

No one ever wants to go to the Emergency Room. The awful wait times, a man with such malodor it offends the nose, a mother holding a crying baby to the left, and to the right a woman who refuses to cover her mouth while she is coughing. That is the pestiferous reality of waiting in a crowded ER. However working in the ER, demands enduring all of those things, simultaneously caring for people that are sick, in some cases dying. The Emergency Room an intense complex place, that left a lasting impact on my life.

Walking through the double doors, an array of rooms numbered one to twenty. In the center of the department the nurses station, where four providers sit in the middle speaking amongst themselves about patient care. Computers on the counter tops, as nurses sit typing in patient charts. On the glass wall in front of the providers sit monitors with vital signs, several of them beeping loudly. There's a harsh smell of cleaner in the air, so strong assaulting your eyes and nose. Throughout the halls staff bustling from room to room checking on the ill.

The ER can represent death, with that overwhelming sadness. "Level one trauma ETA five minutes" over the intercom. Everyone rushes to room six. That's a room no one wants to be in. This room represents trauma. There's a bed that will soon hold a patient, green sheets, no pillow, black rails on the sides. To the left a table with an IV tray full of bandaid, needles, alcohol wipes, and tubes for collecting blood. To the right tall cabinets with life saving supplies. Along the wall a cart with several draws, and sitting on top an A.E.D.. The patient is here a three year old little girl. Her color is off, pale, not rose pink like it should be. As she is being connected to the monitors a loud beep starts to go off. The situation has become dire. "Chest compressions now!" the doctor yells. Without pause a steady pace. Ha.Ha.Ha.Ha. staying alive, staying alive. Felicitous to the gravity of the situation, trying to keep this sweet child alive. Spirits break when anyone dies, the sadness is much deeper when a child is lost.

Any one day there is a rollercoaster of emotions. From happy to sad, sad to mad, and back to happy all before lunch! If the walls could whisper, so many voices could be heard. A grandmother lying in a bed, her face lined with wrinkles, tired from a glorious life takes her last breath surrounded by her family. A little girl covered in dirt sitting with an ice back on her arm after falling on the playground at school. There's a young man, strong jaw line, with what is a handsome face under all the bruising and swelling laying on a cart, with machines keeping him alive, as his mother looks on in desperation for answers to why her son will never wake up again.

Then there are cases of pure satisfaction and joy. "Code Blue". It's a fascinating scene. An ER team working together in perfect sync. The doctor, nurse, and supporting staff. Room six once again. Same cart, same green sheet, next to the bed a blue cart pulled close with seven drawers filled with live saving medications. The patient rolls in with a fire fighting crouched on the cart pumping blood through this man's body. Constant rhythm, at least one hundred beats per minute. The rush traveling through, having a part in saving someone's life, is extraordinary.

Working in the Emergency Room opened my eyes, that tomorrow is never promised. Sometimes it's not the old lady that passes from old age, it's the child that was out for a bike ride. Some days lives are saved, and someday fighting your own tears, become a shoulder for a

grieving family member. This place disassociated my mind and heart, so much sadness, equal parts satisfaction and joy. My heart grew, to show my empathy, while my mind processes death as a part of life, becoming numb to the emotion. The ER is a dynamic setting filled with many turbulent times, the lessons learned will span a lifetime, as well the memory of all the souls that passed.

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By Kaniesha Smith

Atticus Poetry once said, "She was powerful, not because she wasn't scared but because she went on so strongly, despite the fear", this quote means a lot to me because although I have been abused, neglected, and molested, I still never gave up even though I was afraid and wanted to quit. I kept moving forward and now I can say I made it however, as a little girl at the age of nine, I moved into a medium sized house with my mother and my six siblings. The house was red and gray with a subtle hint of white, and it had a beauty that only the natural eye could encapsulate. This house was where I began adolescence, but I now realize that house was not a home, but something much worse. In all the nostalgia that came with the house under the floors was a nightmare. Being a rape victim survivor at the age of nine taught me how to communicate, I did this by eventually writing how I felt in a diary that was giving to me on my birthday. I was also taught to be precautious I learned this by staying away from people, watching my surroundings and looking over my shoulder wherever I went. Finally, I learned how to forgive, although I'm still learning this one concerning other people, I learned how to forgive myself by telling myself that it's not my fault and I'm going to survive.

On Saturday August 15, 2009, I lost a part of me that I would never be able to get back; I lost my identity, my soul, and even my heart. Before I was sexually assaulted, I wasn't watchful of my surroundings. I was just a little girl who wanted to play dress-up with her baby alive doll (Angelina) in a house full of pain and sorrow. I never thought that I would be forced to sleep in a dark basement freezing cold with no tv or any type of light that a tall man would stand over me in the middle of the night. I never thought that he would cover my face with a pillow and tell me not to make a sound as he heavily put all his weight on top of me. I never wanted to smell the bitter alcohol on his tongue and the scent of sweat on his body while he forced himself inside me as I longed for air, not being able to speak or even yell for him to stop. I never thought that at that moment, I would lose a part of me that I was told was supposed to be there forever, but I did.

This event forced me to become evil all I seen was death and darkness it was like I was a whole new person as if I was an adult like he told me. I got into a lot of fights at school, I disrespected my mother, and I even broke the mirror in the bathroom with my bare fist. I even stopped talking completely; I was just a ghost walking in a house full of noise and people that didn't even notice that I was hurting or becoming weak. I stopped eating for months because I was so disappointed in myself. I was angry with life; I hated me. I felt like it was my fault, I thought to myself that I shouldn't have been so friendly, shouldn't have started calling him my uncle, I should 've just minded my business, I shouldn't have been so quiet and maybe he wouldn't have thought about doing what he did if he knew I would tell, he probably would've just left me alone. I hated me for being so caring for wanting to make everyone happy, I hated myself for wanting to be seen, for wanting to be loved I just knew it was my fault!

As I grew, I learned how to be cautious with who I trusted and called my friend. Precautious is a measure taken in advance to prevent something dangerous, unpleasant, or inconvenient from happening. I pushed people away, for example I use to go to my aunt house every day after school to hang with my cousin but I stopped going after my she told me that she noticed that I been sad lately and wanted to know if something was wrong, I screamed and told her to never talk to me again. I pretended to be sick all the time so that I wouldn't have to be

around people. and did not allow them to get close just so I wouldn't get hurt again, and I wouldn't have to worry about anyone leaving me or even betraying me. Being raped changed my life and I will always have this wall of caution up just so that I can protect me since no one ever did.

As a rape victim communication was always something I struggled with. I couldn't make a sound during my rape and I couldn't make a sound after my rape. Instead I cried in silence, in the shower as the blood ran down my leg and flowed down the drain, I was still silent I didn't scream I just washed it away. As I stood looking at myself in the mirror, eyes bloodshot red, watching the tears fall, I screamed inside my head wishing someone would save me already. I couldn't say a word as I walked past my mother's room looking at her sitting in the bed watching tv. I wanted her to hold me, to protect me, and let me know that it would be ok and that it wasn't my fault. I wanted her to know and feel my pain, but the words didn't come out; I couldn't speak. I could hardly move for years I have always been silent, and they never noticed the hurt, they never noticed the pain, and they didn't even notice that I was broken; the silence had completely taken over my body. It took control of mind as I cut myself blaming everyone for what happened to me for not knowing that I was different. I blamed them all until I turned eighteen and finally got the courage to speak up to tell my story. Telling my story and being able to open my mouth brought pain and tears, but it helped me because I'm no longer silent; I'm able to tell someone when I'm hurting or when I need help.

As a little girl, it was hard for me to forgive. I once read a google quote that said, "forgiveness doesn't excuse their behavior. Forgiveness prevents their behavior from destroying your heart." I felt like nobody deserves it, including my rapist, my mother, and even my father. I blamed everyone but most importantly I blamed my rapist for the pain he caused me, for forcing me to do things a little girl should never do. I couldn't forgive him because I knew he wasn't sorry; I knew he was happy for what he did to me, and I just couldn't forgive him. But as I got older, I realized that I just had to forgive not for him but for myself, because if I didn't forgive him, I would continue to blame myself. He would continue to have power over me and over my life and I couldn't do that. I knew it was time to take back my life and use my voice to do so. I knew that I couldn't be silent anymore. It was time for me to fight back and be in control of my life for once.

A great woman name Elizabeth Murphy once said, "I feel so much stronger than I have ever before. I'm putting the night behind me so I can open a new door". Being raped not only made me a victim but it also made me a survivor. I don't like labeling myself as a victim, so I prefer to label myself as a survivor because I was able to overcome a tragic event on my own and I was able to see my way through it without giving up. Although I had to learn some really challenging lessons at a young age, I thank God for them because it made me into the strong and beautiful young woman I am today. And even though it took me awhile I gained myself love and self-confidence back and although some people try to take it away from me, I continue to fight because I refuse to let anyone control my life again. Even though my story is still going on it would never be that way again.

The House on Polk Street

By Taryn Smith

Places and people come and go like seasons. Everything starts out bright and beautiful just like spring, and usually ends cold and depressing like winter. Everyone has that place that takes them back and helps them remember where they started from and helps them reflect on who they became today. My grandparent's house taught me many life lessons and helped us learn how to approach life head on. In their house I learned to work hard and not let anything defeat us from succeeding. This house built me, and I will in time pass on the same morals I received from this home and pass it on to my children.

My memory goes to an older, white, two story home, that has a long sidewalk that goes on for miles in each direction. First you come out the old farmhouse screen door that grandma would yell from; to usually tell you time to come inside. My Grandparents always had a bicycle in the shed just east of the house. It was meant for you to race really fast up and down that sidewalk, or so you thought. At times you felt like you were flying, and at that time all care in the world left you. Those little legs of yours pedaling that bike also made those rides seem to go on for miles. Nothing slowed you down but you and your own inability to look. Grandpa left tools out on the sidewalk from working in the yard. You always knew when you found one because they would quickly fall to the hot pavement. You had to always remember to catch yourself before skinning your nose, followed by the stinging and burning sensation in your palms. But nothing beats this part of the memory. The tall, scary, Grizzly Adams looking man with thick, greasy, long fingered hands would pick me up and brush me off and set me back up on that bike. Grandpa would squat down to my level, proceed to chuckle and push his glasses up on his nose and turn his baseball cap from Cabela's backward. He then would go on with "You got this honey! Go again!" You would then push yourself through the stinging hands and push through what felt like your biggest defeat in life. Even though you had tears welling in your eyes, the little bit of encouragement always made you forget the stinging palms and the loss of pride you just endured. On that sidewalk Grandpa was always pushing us kids and reminding us about not letting the little things in life get us down or keep us from succeeding.

Grandma, on the other hand, is very old fashioned and still is. In her kitchen she would teach us how to survive through the good and bad times. She used to always tell us kids, "I want to teach you how to grow and prepare your next meal, I want to make sure in the toughest times you can still provide for your family." Grandma always pushed us to be strong, hardworking women. I would spend my time with grandma canning, crafting, or learning something new in the sewing room. Occasionally we would pull out the family cookbook and learn to make something new. My favorite thing to make from the cookbook was her mother's homemade noodles. I loved after all the ingredients were mixed, we would roll a big, sticky dough ball around in flour and just keep rolling it until the rolling pin would not stick to it. Grandma always took care of cutting the noodles up and allowing them to dry. Grandma would take us out every day and pick the veggies and herbs/spices from the garden that were ready. We had routine with grandma and summers with her meant each day was designated for something, Saturdays were always my favorite though. Saturdays we would get up early enjoy biscuits and gravy from scratch, then start a long day of canning. Tomatoes always seemed to be the biggest abundance of things from the garden to get canned. Grandpa was always in charge of canning up stewed tomatoes and grandma and I always oversaw salsa and spaghetti sauce. Grandma always

knew how to blend the right seasoning and spices to make anything taste heavenly. You could always tell when it was time to cool the salsa and spaghetti sauce, because grandma's house smelt like an authentic Mexican restaurant that would instantly make your mouth salivate for chips and salsa. I always loved watching the Ball mason jars steam from the warm mixtures that grandma would ladle into them. We would then seal the jars and tip them upside down to pressure seal. My grandma always said, "Home is where your heart is." Grandma's words were true about that saying; we always loved being there and their house always has held a special place in our hearts.

My Grandparents gave us a second home and were like a second set of parents. Our parents worked 2 jobs the majority of the time while we were growing up, so we had no other place to go. We would stay with them for weeks at a time, sometimes even through weekends. We always knew going to their house we would have fun and make amazing new memories. I remember one weekend grandma had nothing for us to do and it was pouring rain. The sidewalks and yard were standing full of water and we kept whining to grandma about being bored. Grandma had one rule in her house, and it was to never complain of boredom. She was great at curing boredom, even if half the time the cure was scrubbing floors or washing walls. But this time it was life changing. she pulled out big rolls of yarn and decided today we would learn to crochet. As we sat in the living room of her house that was painted in a dark tan and had the softest carpet you ever felt, she started our next lesson. As she sat in her normal spot on the big, brown, overstuffed couch. She pulled out these metal hooks, wrapped the yarn around them, and proceeded to show us the sequence of how to crochet. I was so little back then and can't remember the steps anymore, but I remember watching her crochet for hours and how she was doing it so fast. I also remember her pushing me to not give up; I many times ended up in a knotted-up mess

Grandpa was more of the life lesson coach in our lives; he would talk us through any problem and give us the steps to try to overcome it. If Grandpa was not to be found in the yard, you would find him sitting in his chair at the round oak table in dining room. That's where he sat talking to his own mother telling her the same story for the tenth time this week. Grandpa was the type who always had a story to help lead you out of darkness and assist you back to light. Grandpa was a fun character to know; he had early stages of dementia ever since I was able to remember. He always had the best idea and tasked any issue in hand. He was the best listener, but also our biggest cheerleader. Grandpa always made sure in that house you knew that there was always someone to support you and your everyday decisions.

My grandparents were very stubborn people and knocked heads quite a bit. They always showed us what a true relationship needed to be in life. They displayed love and trust; they showed us that everything works out better if you are a team. They displayed it in many ways growing up in their home, and I carried on the same ways in my home.

They were and grandma still is the type, you got a problem? Well I'm only a phone call or a short drive across town away. She will help anyway she can to give you advice or just lend a listening ear. Grandma shares stories with my children and allow them to hear and learn about the man they will never get the time to know. Grandma loves to sit and go through scarp books with my kids and talk about their relationship they once had; but also how maxing of a man he was.

My grandpa is no longer here to pick me up and brush me off, give me my life lesson story of the week or that needed encouragement. But my comforting home is, and the grandma

that would stand in the screen door and holler, will still talk about the good days and make your bad days better reminiscing about the old times spent in their home. When it is Grandma's time to join grandpa, I will still always have my "Home." It's left to me when the time comes for them to be together again. I promised them both I would pass on everything they taught us kids in that house. All the stories, all the life lessons they helped us through, even the yummy recipes grandma taught us to whip up over the years in her kitchen. I'm glad my children get to enjoy my grandma and get the time to make the memories with her like I did. My oldest child asks about the man in the photos around the house with grandma, and we are very honest and open. As they grow, they will hear about the fun memories their aunt and I had in their house. They will understand why their mom is so hard on them and expects so much from them. Kids today will never understand the struggles of their parents due to modernization and Technology in the world. I promised my grandparents that my kids would enjoy old time morals and simplicity of life while growing up. I'm glad I had these people to push me in life, give me the steps to succeed, but also show us through hard work and dedication you can achieve anything. But most of all, I'm glad I had a house to build me and mold me to be the woman and mother I am today.

The Rockstar With No Band

By Kory Walts

It has been almost six years since my dad passed. At first, the pain was almost unbearable. Now it's like I can feel his presence around me. As if, somehow, over time he had become my very own shadow. If you were one of the lucky people who got the chance to meet Gary Walts JR then, at the very least, you would understand: Here is a guy who knew how to have a good time.

As a boy, my father was bestowed with the title "Tadpole" while on a hunting trip. Footnote: The Walts family came from a long line of hunters. Going back at least five generations. If it swam, flew, or scurried around the North Eastern Kansas territory then it was hunted by the Walts family. My grandfather was taking my dad and Logston, a family friend, to a secret pond that was our "honey hole" for bull frogs and bass. That night's hunting session was aimed toward gigging bull frogs. Along the way walking toward the pond Jerry noticed that little Gary would purposely watch how his dad would carry his frogging gig, tighten his cap, and stow away pillow cases in his back pocket. He further noticed that little Gary was eagerly ready to mimic each step just as his father did. They arrived at the "honey hole." The smell of pond water and loud deep bellows of nearby bullfrogs filled the air. On the pond's edge, lay sharp rocks that is covered with that slippery kind of pond moss. Logston was witnessing the disaster unfold. He quickly yelled to my Grandfather. "Hey Frog you better catch your Tadpole before he slips and busts his ass." It was easy to understand that Tadpole wanted to be so much like his dad.

I am told by my Aunt Kelly and Cousin Jon that the metamorphosis from Tadpole to Junior was in his teenage years. Junior was distancing himself from the all star athlete and avid hunter his father wanted him to become. In those years it was sex, drugs, and rock n'roll that demanded his attention. Keep in mind, my Dad was always a little guy, barely a buck fifty soaking wet. So at five feet eight inches and eighteen years old, he knew that he had to constantly find ways to show his "worth." His first run in with Johnny Law was when he, and a few friends tried to steal guitars at Bass and Treble (an old guitar store on the avenue). I am told, it was a spur-of-the-moment kind of deal. I am assuming it was fueled by inebriated promises of glory among his circle. Junior literally broke into the store by breaking the front glass door with his fist covered in a flannel shirt. The door broke enough to cut deep into his forearm, leaving a spiral like gash. Wound aside, he created a hole big enough to flip the lock. They quickly got through the door, grabbed the most expensive looking electric guitars and was out before the fuzz could arrive. They would have gotten away with it too if Juniors cut wasn't so deep. After stashing the guitars he rushed to the hospital to get stitches. The police were able to match the blood on the glass door to Junior's based on the blood work they had done in the hospital. That was his first felony, and trip to the big boy jail.

A few years pass now and his prison days are in his rearview mirror. He is now full adult in his early twenties and found a style that matched his "live in the moment" personality. Picture what you would consider a little guy in height, but had a certain type of walk that portrayed him walking taller than Andre the Giant. Confident strut aside, Dad's wardrobe would leave bystanders a bit baffled knowing that someone could hold such a confident step walking out of the house with the goofy outfits he called "his style". His favorite type of shirts were always pastel colored muscle shirts. I think he felt the coolest in the '80s. He would pair his muscle shirts with worn light denim shorts that, in my opinion, were uncomfortably too high from the

knee. No matter what he wore, he always had work boots on his feet. I think they were light brown once, but, now all you see are shoelaces infested with cockaburrs, paint splatter sprinkled all over, and mud that seemed to have fused into the leather. However if you would ask “G” himself, he would say the proverbial icing on the cake for his wardrobe was his business in the front and party in the back mullet, and a goatee that would make Walter White, from Breaking Bad, green with envy.

Also, how he approaches people is worth addressing. By now he as gained a certain skill set that enables him to strike up a meaningful conversation with almost anyone. You can be walking through Walmart minding your own business and this firecracker of a man would look at your groceries and say “Yum...I’ll bring the beer when’s dinner?” They would laugh and start shooting the breeze with him. I tried that once, and when I did the silence was so awkward I could feel sweat bead on my forehead, and could swear I heard crickets chirp during that uncomfortable exchange. All the while the random person just stared at me blankly. So yeah, Ol’ G had a unique swag to his approach. I was always fascinated with how he could effortlessly befriend anyone.

Fast forward three more years in the future. “G” has fallen in love with a beautiful woman and became a proud poppa of a little girl and baby boy. However, fatherhood wasn’t enough to calm his thirst for money and respect. Along the way he had learned how to really make money. By day he was a professional house painter and by night it was “trade and sale” of the drug variety. He wasn’t too shy for the occasional B&E’s either. There was one time that “G” and my uncle Mark decided to rob this coke dealer just a few blocks away from where we were living at the time. They knew this man was a buck twenty soaking wet and had a yuppie “no gun lifestyle.” So a perfect mark for the job. They kicked down the door, faces covered with black ski masks and they had their fingers in their shirts like they were concealing pistols. They made their way into the front room. On the glass coffee table were two wads of money wound with rubber bands, a circle mirror, and a big bag of cocaine. On the couch was a bottle of lotion, a box of tissues, and a poor excuse of a drug dealer with pants down frozen in fear. They busted in just as he was rubbing one out! G yelled “get up and face the wall!” The dealer shot up from the brown leather couch with his pants around his ankles and did a kind of penguin step toward the nearest wall. While he was waddling over he tripped, and crashed into the wall hard enough you could practically see stars circling his head. They quickly grabbed the cocaine, the money, and were out the door before he could wake up. This was hard for me to believe at first, with my Dad’s storytelling and all, but my uncle has always been a straight shooter. Years later I asked Uncle Mark about this adventure, he got a good laugh and then with tears of laughter still filling his eyes, he said “Its true but swear to me you will not tell anyone”....Oops. Sorry unc!

Honest construction work, drug dealing, and B&E’s aside, all was well for the young Walts’ family. Until the dreary August night when my Dad and my Mom had decided to go driving around with friends. Before they left they made sure my sister and I were with my Aunt Kelly so they would have an evening to themselves and the next morning to recover. They were riding with their friend Leroy and his girl. Gary Jr and Michelle, my Mom, were in the backseat of a Jeep Wrangler. It was the kind of Jeep that had no doors and tires that could find a road in any terrain. I am told Leroy was arguing with his girl while driving down a moon lit twisty desert road. In the heat of the argument Leroy took his eyes off the road long enough for them to suddenly start staring at a Ford pickups headlights . Everyone was wearing a seatbelt, but somehow my mom’s snapped, and she flew through the windshield. Gary Jr woke up and saw

Leroy and his lady unconscious with blood all over the dashboard. He said the ringing in his head and the Ford's constant horn blaring in the back ground was deafening. While dazed and barely conscious, he climbed out of the Jeep and there he saw his beloved wife wincing in pain just a few yards in front of him. Before he could hold a thought he was there holding her as she died in his arms. He said there was blood everywhere and it looked almost black in the moon light. With tears in his eyes he screamed for help, knowing that was the last moment he had with her. A part of my dad died with her that night.

We sued the car company for faulty seatbelts and moved back to Wathena, KS. He did this so his parents could help him raise the kids. He began his new journey in life as Gary Walts Jr., a young man in his twenties who was forced to become a single parent of two. He busted his ass playing both parts of mom and dad. To his kiddos he would always hold a strong and loving smile that read "Everything was going to be okay." He was at every ball game, every dance recital, and made sure to take us hunting with him like his father did when he was just a boy. The money left over was burning a hole in his pocket.

So for a few years he manage to fill the void left in his heart with new toys, drugs, alcohol, empty relationships, fake friends, and a mountain of debt the was looming over his foreseeable future. Cousin Jon Walts said best. "He lived life like a rockstar but wasn't in a band." Ultimately, the weight of my mother's death consumed him. Drinking and doing drugs finally caught up with him. He was forty-seven when he passed. Even though his story had a dark ending; I cant help but see his light. He was the Son who looked at his father as a hero, a friend who was always ready to make an unforgettable memory, a husband that loved his wife entirely, and father who always tried. He would always tell us kids "Do as I say not as I've done" and personally, my favorite quote, was "Always tell your loved ones you love them at the end of each call, because you never know when it will be your last call".

Growing up we all look at our dads as our hero's. I would have to say my dads super power was having a magnetic aura around him that would draw anyone in, and make them happier for having to have met him. I genuinely hope I can somehow pass down his inviting and caring personality to my kids and so on. I would like, very much, for his charisma to be just a Walts Thing.



Interview

Elizabeth Marie

By Sarah Brown

“Twinkle, Twinkle little.... Oh no I forgot the words!!!” My sister got pregnant with her first born young, as in still in high school young. My sister had a boyfriend at the time, and we all liked him. He was my brother’s best friend--even though he didn’t know the nursery rhyme “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” They had been dating for a while and he was a good guy, and we all got along with him. We had never expected to hear something like this happen too my sister, especially from him. I interviewed my sister about the time she found out she was pregnant with my niece and the feelings she had throughout the pregnancy. I learned more about how my sister felt after being raped, and while being pregnant, this knowledge helped us to grow closer.

My sister never thought something so heinous could ever happen to her. When you choose someone to date you’re supposed to trust them. My sister expressed her astonishment by stating, “How the hell did this happen?” (1:00). My sister had just found out she was having a kid, she was 16 years old, a sophomore in high school. She couldn’t believe it was happening, but she knew how it had. My sister went on a date with her boyfriend, and they went back to his mom’s house and were hanging out in his room. His mom was downstairs with the tv on. While in the bedroom her boyfriend at the time, for the sake of this story we will call him Richard Cranium, decided he was tired of waiting on her to say yes to having sex. He forced her into it. I asked her how she had felt after, she took a deep breath, exhaled and said, “I felt helpless, like I had no self-control” (4:45-5:00). My sister ended up becoming pregnant from that rape. She looked away for a minute, looked back at me and sighed. “I felt ashamed” (7:31). She had nothing to be ashamed of. Knowing that my sister was ashamed of something she couldn’t control makes me tremendously mad. I just want to go up to anyone who made her feel this way and punch them. I never want to see my sister feel this way. During the interview I told my sister that she has nothing to be ashamed of, and that it was not her fault.

To finish school is a goal for everyone, to finish school while raising a kid that’s a miracle. Danielle was 16 years young when she found out she was pregnant; she found out when she was six months along. She was a sophomore in high school at Savannah High School. She told me “I stayed in school, finished and had help from the school through a program they had” (1:37). My sister didn’t let this little inconvenience, at the time, take a toll on her education, she stuck to the books and keep chugging along through high school. The hardest part I feel like that would have been for her is knowing she would have to see him every day. She got bullied for being pregnant in high school and she couldn’t do anything about, but no one knew the true story. She never gave up though, she stayed strong, even though it wasn’t normal to be pregnant and be in high school. My sister set the tone for me, meaning I learned from her mistakes. I went to school and I busied myself with schoolwork and didn’t pay attention to anyone but my friends. I didn’t date in high school, I went to friends’ houses, went to school events with friends but that’s it.

My sister was raped, and he got away with it. She was pissed, my parents were pissed, and I was pissed relistening to the story. My sister didn’t go to my parents right away: “I knew I could always go to mom and dad, but I didn’t, I was too scared” (11:00). I don’t know if she thought my parents would have kicked her out or would have been disappointment in her. I remember having cops at our house, as I talked to Danielle, she had stated something about the police. She explained, “We went to the police station, because he had raped me” (11:15). There was no justice to this case. Richard had told Danielle “He was told that the only reason he was

not in jail is because he had a message on his phone stating I wanted to have sex” (12:29). My sister doesn’t recall ever sending a text message to him like that, she went through every single excruciating message and tried to find it but couldn’t. Richard had gotten away with raping a minor and joined the Army. He did eventually admit to her that he raped her. She didn’t do anything about it, only because in all honesty what could have been done? She’d have the police reopen the case on a conversation that they had, and chance him denying the whole thing. The only outcome was he must pay child support. I personally cannot fathom the frustration and anxiety that was strung out during the case. I have always been taught to be careful what you send in a message because it’s forever. I was never allowed to have a boy in my room with out the door open. It was not that my parents didn’t trust me, they didn’t trust the guys. Although I didn’t have many boys over, I don’t think I even fully trusted them myself, it was scary thinking about what happened to my sister so easily with someone she knew so well, that supposedly cared about her. It was terrifying to think that it could happen to me.

Elizabeth Marie Miller, a beautiful baby girl born on February 10, 2009. With my mom, dad and oldest brother in the room, my sister gave birth to Lizzy. Excitement. Nervousness. Awareness. Anxiety. Happiness. Joy. Every emotion you can think of filled the house when my sister returned home from the hospital with Lizzy. I was an aunt! I got to come home and play with my baby niece; I was so happy. My sister was in bliss as well, but reality sets in. Danielle restarts her journey with high school by doing schoolwork again while taking care of a newborn baby. Danielle said, “I do not regret having Lizzy, she makes me want to be a better person” (6:57). My sister told me her favorite things about Lizzy: “She is quiet, spunky, sassy, she is into dancing, she is a spitting image of me” (23:00). I agree with her whole heartedly. We can all look back at pictures of Danielle as a young kid and then look at Lizzy and you can definitely tell that she is her mother. I have always been a fan of Lizzy, she is my little best friend, she made my days better when I had a crappy day. Now watching her grow up and she is already 10 years old its crazy, she is almost half my age.

I have always been there for my sister, but we are five years apart in age. My sister and I tell each other everything, from who our crushes are, even though we are both married, to whether we got lucky last night or not. When it came to this traumatic event for her, she didn’t talk to anyone, but she wishes she would have. Some advice she would like to give is, “Talk to someone if you can, it’s not easy to keep it all in” (16:49) Danielle kept what happened to her a secret and ended up pregnant and didn’t find out until she was six months. She would have always gone through the pregnancy, but she still took away the opportunity to have a chance of a choice. It sucks to not have a choice. It makes you feel as though you are stuck in the situation and then you resent the problem. Danielle would never resent Lizzy but at the same time I wouldn’t blame her for resenting not having a choice. I have always been able to make my own choices; I have never been pushed into anything. It sounds bad but because of what happened to my sister, my parents have been more cautious when it came to me.

As cliché as it sounds karma will always come back to bite you in the butt. I have no idea what karma had in store for Richard Cranium, or if it has even struck him yet, but when it does, I will be found in a corner laughing. I promise I am not that bad of a person I just strongly dislike this guy. There are so many guys like this, and because of them girls feel ashamed, as if they are to blame for what has happened, it’s not your fault. Do not feel ashamed for the things you cannot control. The lesson I learned from this interview was that even through the rough patches’ family is always there. We will always be there to listen and be a shoulder to cry on.

Not So Happy Endings

By Ashley Casper

I've binged countless episodes of television shows, watching people's story lines unfold like a fairy tale. The American dream, with a white picket fence surrounding your yard. Mom and dad are happily married with kids and nothing ever goes wrong. Everyone lives in perfect harmony. In a recent interview with my older sister we looked back on what our childhood was like and how we remember things. From this interview, I've come to realize that fairy tales don't really exist like that. My parents weren't happily married, and we didn't always live in harmony. That's why my dad left.

Once upon a time, my parents were inseparable. Except, marriage needs strong love to be stable but the fixation my father developed with alcohol was stronger than the love he had for my mom. It was stronger than the love he had for his children, and his own well being. Assuming that he had a love for all of these things at least, it wasn't enough. His addiction not only tore him away from the home he created, but in the end consumed him. My sister says, "He never could put the bottle down."

The day my dad walked out of my life, was the day he kept walking and never came back. I was young, maybe six or seven, so I didn't really have a concept of time but I do remember this day in small bits. I can close my eyes and imagine our white walls, the furniture in the living room and the staircase leading to my room. I sat with him that day on the couch, like I did any day. I sat propped in his lap, exchanging Eskimo kisses, playing, and inquisitively asking him about his tattoos or anything else my young mind was so curious about. After this, my memory draws a blank. I can clearly remember him opening up our front door and closing it behind him though. I don't think I understood what was truly happening, nor did I realize at that moment that this was goodbye. Even so, I sat in tears and watched him disappear up the street. That was my goodbye.

My sister and I recall the memory of him leaving quite often, as well as many others. Prior to today, I have wondered so much about things I didn't get to experience. Sarah is much older than me, and therefore I think our experiences were so different but also had very similar effects. She can vividly remember the details of things from this specific day, events before, and even things she recalls happening after the event. She told me how much resentment she felt towards our father and how even though she loved him there would always be that anger in her. My sister remembers him just plainly being a drunken mess. She told me stories of how he was at the bar almost every night, and had become worse than ever. He was sickly, and on top of his alcohol abuse he had started doing meth. He would do and say the most hateful things to all of us with no reason. In his last days with us, he even got into an altercation with our mother and called us whores. He had said cruel things to her, and made her feel useless. She had even found out he had a secret mistress that he would vent about how horrible his life was and how awful of children we were. In his own rage he finally decided to leave. "I even found him the next day passed out drunk in front of the bar," she said. I know since this moment she's found closure and moved forward, but her personalized experience from this would live with her forever.

My sisters input, opinion, and her openness to share her feelings with me also impacted me. It gave me a better understanding of who my father was and that I didn't miss out on much as a child. I didn't understand for a long time why he left and often blamed myself. I always thought it was something to do for his lack of care for me or our family, but he was sick. He may

have made the choice to begin drinking but I don't think he ever intentionally wanted that to engross his life. Even after listening to all the things he's done, this interview made me realize he was sick and that's why he was the way he is. However, he ruined his reputation as a father and husband by becoming an alcoholic and turning himself into someone he wasn't, and that impacted his life forever and became something he couldn't come back from. Maybe he realized this, but by the time he did it was too late. He didn't even know his own children anymore, so why change now?

I learned a lot and came to a self realization that this is why people say things happen for a reason. Even though I didn't grow up with the perfect, complete family, it has been a good life. It certainly hasn't been a fairy tale, but it also hasn't ended. I still have plenty of room for my happy ending.

Defining moments

By Shaunte Lanham

What defines us? Is it our upbringings, what we make of ourselves, or just because of different generations? I chose to interview a friend of mine, Christian Boyle. He was a Navy brat, who moved back to where his parents' roots began in Memphis, Tennessee at a young age, from Guam. He was raised most of his childhood in Memphis, Tennessee, where he grew up with his brothers and a sister. While interviewing him, we covered everything from growing up, his influences, even different chapters of his life that had defined him up to this point. We talked about the different cultures he experienced and different views on certain topics. He now resides in the Midwest, with one daughter, and another on the way, both bi-racial children. As I expected to write my paper on a specific topic after talking with him, I ended up with an interview on something completely different, but it gave me great knowledge on another subculture. During the interview we talked on how his upbringing, his identity, and the future for next generations would influence and define him as the young black man he is today. With that, I learned we all have different influences in life.

When the interview began, Christian started off reminiscing about his childhood and upbringing, and how this had helped define him. While talking about his upbringing his whole face just lit up, and I could tell his upbringing had a great impact on the free spirited person he is. When asked, "How did your upbringing influence you?" Christian replied, "Being the root of something influenced me to be more creative and learn to express myself differently." He explains how being the root of something, is different than passed on culture. Being the root of something has a different impact on our lives because it's in your blood. He talked about how his roots and upbringing had influenced him to be more creative and taught him to express himself differently. While his youngest brother was an influence and inspiration through their childhood. "We had lots of fun growing up," as he laughed just getting the words out. He learned from his youngest brother to be more accepting through life. While growing up in Memphis, Tennessee life was different from Guam, especially when it came to color, racism, or segregation. Being able to be accepting through their childhood of everything no matter what is was, got him further in life. He learned what not to do and how to adapt throughout his upbringing. As I listened to Christian, I realized I too had a similar influence when it came to being creative and expressing myself differently, mine through art and poetry. I learned our roots influence our upbringing, but in all different ways. He grew up in a different culture and environment, my southern culture was just passed down, which isn't the same as living it. Hearing his stories, I came to understand we all carry something with us, from our past, but learn as we go.

As the interview got deeper, Christian explains what defined his identity. Since he was a Navy brat that experienced different cultures, he became hungry to learn more about all different cultures. He stated, "I'm not a Culture vulture, but home is no matter where I go; I am as equal as any man. We're just built differently." I understood that statement as no matter where he went, he was going to indulge in new cultures, and learn new things, but his roots would never change. He talks about this rebel mindset that can't be stopped, and how that's what sets him apart from others. As a young black man, his identity makes him a target. He must walk or act a certain way because of his color, which only made him smarter and wiser to his surroundings. He didn't see color, but for those of us that did, is what drives him to push

harder. He states, “I won’t stop living my life for no one.” He was very passionate about his identity and the drive he gets from it. As the interview went on, I was learning how his identity drove him; I embraced how we all have different drives and put forth ambition differently. We don’t have to let what other people identify us as, define us as a person. Even though we are all different, we at some point will be judged. It’s all in what we do with that judgment. Will we let it become part of our identity or overcome as Christian did?

Christian and I started talking on how the present and past will affect our newer generations. He explains how being a target and having to uphold a certain standard for the government because of his color, would not stop him from living his life. We teach our children love, peace, and humbleness. He goes on to say, “I will raise my daughters with a mindset in which, no one should beat themselves up for who they really are.” As a black man with a certain standard to uphold and to raise children in a country where it’s falling apart is one problem. Trying to fight so our children have a more accessible life as segregation becomes more noticeable, is another. He states, “I don’t know what will happen per say in five years, but I do hope the best and think we will stand together for our children.” It’s all in how we educate our children, so we can make a difference for the next generations. What we are willing to learn, as we teach our children to be smarter in living, and the choices they make in the society we live in, is a concept I learned from interviewing Christian. I’m not the only one fighting this battle. We’re all different in some way, but we should all be equal.

I really enjoyed my interview with Christian because I learned a lot from him, and it was nice to have another insight on a few topics. Learning how our views and different influences has helped define us all as humans. As a woman, my kids are my every day drive; to hear a man have that same drive, defining him as a man, only makes sense. We all live with daily ambitions and drives. They just differ from person to person, just as we are different in everything else. We’re all humans, just different breeds, fighting different battles, to succeed. I got to see how a young black man who was raised in the south viewed himself, others, and how time would help define him. While interviewing Christian I learned how his upbringing, his identity, and the future generations would influence him and become defining moments in his life. This interview really helped me open my mind up to another subculture on a whole new level. It gave me a better understanding of our different influences, how we learn as we go, that we have the choice to choose our identity, and that no matter what our differences are, we’re all equal.

The Day That Changed Our Families Lives Forever

By Ben Miller

One day your family could be happy and together, and then the next it's torn apart. Lacey Jo was a very young, vibrant 19-year-old who enjoyed everything about life. She was a very outgoing person who loved her family and children. She liked being outside, going fishing, and camping. She was just an overall sweet, loving, kindhearted person. From these interviews, I learned more about my cousin's death, the lessons my family learned, and how it left them feeling empty and robbed of memories that should have been made.

It was just a normal hot, August Sunday when the event happened that changed my families' lives forever. Everyone was just hanging out around their own house. My aunt Janvie and the rest of her family were working around their house getting ready to cook some dinner. Aunt JoAnn and her family were watching a movie and snacking on some chips and salsa she had made for the day. My parents were giving my brothers haircuts and making dinner. Janvie got the call first and she was in disbelief. She said, "I threw the phone at Uncle Greg and he got all the information and we headed to Kansas City" (2:55-Janvie). When my parents got the call, we were sitting at the table eating dinner and my mom answered the phone and she couldn't make out who it was. All she could understand was that she wanted to talk to my dad, so my dad took the phone, and he said, "it was your uncle Ernie and he said Lacey had been in a real bad wreck and they don't know if she will live" (4:45-Frank). The wreck itself was on Highway 210 going west from Kansas City when my cousin and her boyfriend at the time were hit head on by two teenage girls going way too fast. My cousin's car flipped end over end three times before landing back on it's tires. The two teenage girls died on impact and my cousin and her boyfriend were flown to Kansas City North trauma center. When I was talking to all of my family members, they all said, "It was the longest drive to Kansas City ever." They were very nervous and didn't know what to expect. Because they knew Lacey was on a vent and with the medical background that my Aunt JoAnn and my mom had, they knew it wasn't good and they had a terrible feeling about it.

The first personal effect it had on my family probably the most is how empty they felt after this event happen. My Aunt Janvie, which is my cousin's mom, says that, "There's an emptiness, a hole in my heart" (14:40-Janvie). She also goes on and says that "what if... Like what if she was still here, what would she be doing, what would she be like? I sit here and just wait for her to pull in the driveway but she never does" (13:45-Janvie). Janvie's point is that there's not a single day that Lacey doesn't go through her head. Janvie is always wondering when she is going to come home, but in reality she never will., and I believe that's where her emptiness and hole in her heart comes from. I think that's kind of where my Aunt JoAnn is coming from as well, because she said, "a piece of my heart is missing" (16:10-JoAnn). She goes on and states, "The family has never been the same" (16:30-JoAnn). They always used to go to the lake because that's what Lacey loved to do. And since this event my family has only been one time and I asked her, why do you think that it changed the family? And she told me, "because there is a piece missing"(16:50-JoAnn). I believe this is what hurts my Aunt JoAnn most because no one really knew how close her and Lacey really were because Lacey and her had this connection that no one else in the family had with her, and I couldn't get the why out of my Aunt JoAnn but off of what I could tell, I think they had that connection because how honest JoAnn was with her and was able to do stuff for her others couldn't. My parents always told me as I was

growing up that she had the most beautiful smile. I wish I could go back and really remember it, but my dad said one of the hardest things was, “ We lost her beautiful smile and her amazing love” (22:45-23:20-Frank). What he means is that not only did we lose her as a person but we lost a great soul to the family. My mom wears her emotions on her sleeve but she was very calm in this interview and I remember her mentioning that she wishes she would have come into the family sooner because how much she loved Lacey. I think that’s important because it shows how much Lacey could connected with someone even though my mom hadn’t been in the family for very long. It didn’t matter if you were in the family or not, you could just connect with her easily.

The second way that has affected my family is being robbed of the memories that we never got have with her. In her mother's view, “ I never got to experience her wedding or her being able to provide me with grandchildren” (17:15-Janvie). This is very important because I don’t know a single parent who wouldn’t want their child to get married and have children. It’s an experience that most parents dream about and I believe this has hurt Janvie the most. My Aunt JoAnn and I were talking after I stopped recording but I wrote down in my notes when she said, “A car salesman told my dad, you expect to lose your parents, you lose them you lose your past. But when you lose your kids you lose your future” (JoAnn). When she said that I couldn’t believe how true it actually was. If you really think about it, parents really are not supposed to bury their kids, because that’s something they should never ever think of. I think this hit me so hard because I know how much losing her has affected my family and all the success she was going to do with her life.

Even though this event was horrible, my family has learned from it. My Aunt Janvie said, “ Don’t take days for granted, tomorrow is never guaranteed” (21:35-Janvie). Janvie is saying this because of how true it really is. You can’t take anything back from yesterday. Today you have to live life at its fullest because you never know when the man upstairs says it’s your time. JoAnn said, “I learned that you love your loved ones because you never know when they will be gone” (20:20-JoAnn). It’s like when you tell people you’ll see them tomorrow, tomorrow is never guaranteed because like I said, you never know when God says it’s your time. Lastly, my mom said she learned “to make sure everything is resolved before something happens” (pt 2, 1:25-Jeannie). My mom says this for two reasons. One because before Lacey left for Kansas City, Janvie and her got into an argument about her going. Janvie never apologized for it and my mom always makes sure everything is resolved or taken care of now. She never wants that feeling of not apologizing or guilty feeling. Secondly, my mom's uncle had a heart attack when she was little and she helped him to the car and never told him that she loved him before he went to the hospital and he ended up dying a day later, so that’s why she says she always make sure things are solved.

I learned many lessons from my cousins death. One I learned more about the relationships she had with people in my family. How she was closer to some than others . Secondly, how it affected and how it still affects people in my family which is what I was trying to get out of the paper. So just remember, tomorrow is never guaranteed and always tell your loved ones you love them because you never know when you’re going to lose them. From this interview, I learned more about my cousins death, the lessons my family learned, it left them feeling empty and robbed of memories that should have been made.

My Inspiration

By Lauren Street

Adversity is a reality as humans we will all face at some point in our lives. Alex Street is someone who I am very proud to call my sister. Today, she is a nineteen year old mother who has the weight of the world resting on her shoulders. Even though my sister faced adversity with having a baby, she taught me that even though life can throw us obstacles, we can overcome anything we put our mind to with the strength of selflessness and drive to be better every single day. From before my sister brought another life into the world, the life or death emergency she had to go through, and how her life has changed her values and perspective on life is a quality I will always admire about my sister. Since I was young, my sister always taught me to follow my heart and do what's best for me regardless of what other people say.

Looking back to when we were little girls, I remember her always looking out for me and making sure I was safe at all times with an intention to always want the best for me. A vivid memory I have of my sister is when I was in elementary school and she was in middle school. She would always get out of school before me and I was always worried about getting home from school safe because our house was the furthest house down the street from where the bus would drop me off. The first day of school I remember how scared I was to walk home by myself without my sister but little did I know that she would be waiting for me to walk me home from the bus stop so I wouldn't be alone. The feeling of being protected and cared for by someone like my sister made me realize how she's had the characteristics of being a great mother since she was a little girl. From the first day she walked me home to the last, I knew she was destined to be an amazing caregiver to anyone she wants to care for in her life.

With care, comes a sense of selflessness that I believe my sister was born with. The day my sister found out she was going to bring a new life into this world there were many emotions from not only my sister but from my whole family. At first, my family didn't think it was right and we all knew she was so young with a lot of life ahead of her but ultimately it was my sister's decision and at the time we didn't know, it was the best decision she has ever made. Like any other day, my sister went about her daily routine like normal but started to feel sick and her body was achy. She decided it was best to take a pregnancy test just to make sure. When she found out she was pregnant she was scared of what my family might think and scared for her future but at the end of the day she knew she had to make the best decision for herself based on her beliefs and what she thought was right for her life. With tears forming in her eyes, Alex states "I realized It's not just my life anymore I am taking care of two people now" (18:51). Alex is stating that she is coming to the realization that she is growing up and realizing that this real life. I've always known that my sister is strong and very capable of taking on this next chapter of her life but when she finally came to that realization that day, I feel as if it hit her a little deeper than she had expected.

After the realization that Alex was going to become a mother, she became a different person in a matter of weeks after coming to terms that she had to mature and know the depth of the situation. Throughout her pregnancy journey she never had any sickness or pain while carrying her child for nine months and she never once complained about her struggles because that is just who my sister is. When the day finally came for her to bring her son into his world, the feeling of things going easy dramatically changed. On the morning of April 2, 2018 Alex was scheduled to give a normal birth to her baby boy. Ten minutes before going into the delivery

room, Alex was informed that she had to have an emergency C section. Alex was terrified because undergoing any type of surgery can be fatal. While interviewing my sister, I notice the tone in her voice changes when she explains, "If you have to pick between me and my son, pick my son" (29:10). During Alex's C section, the last thing she remembers is telling the doctors that if they can only save one of them, she wants them to save her son. My sister had never told me before now and I feel as if it's because she never wanted to look back and remember that part of her pregnancy because it was such a traumatic event in her life. Thinking about whether or not my sister would make it is an image I never want to have to think about again. Alex had shown selflessness that day by giving her son a chance at life even if that meant sacrificing her own.

While Alex made the decision to sacrifice her life if things went wrong in the operating room, I realized that my sister grew as a human in so many ways during pregnancy and taking on this new responsibility and chapter of her life. Alex grew not only as a person, but as a mother as well. It has been such a pleasure to be able to learn and grow in her footsteps. I hope one day I can become half as the mother that she is today. With confidence in her voice, Alex reveals that "In the past two years I have seen myself mature from being a normal teenager in highschool to a young mother" (0:39). As she came to the realization of where she is in her life now, Alex has mastered the thought that she can do almost anything now because she made the decision to have a baby and work hard. At the end of the day she does not regret for a second not bringing her child into the world because it makes her the person that she is today. My sister has always been a role model to me but after seeing her go through what she's been through and still wake up every morning with a smile on her face. Just being able to wake up each morning is a blessing that Alex shows gratitude for. I will look back on and remember that life is so precious and it can be taken away from you in a matter of seconds. Alex holds onto the thought that she can not take her life for granted, she lives each day as if it were her last. Looking back, I remember walking into my sister's hospital room only two hours after having an emergency C section and she was doing her English final online because it was due that day. Alex's dedication and hard work has shown me that you can do anything in life if you work for it and believe in yourself.

They say "life is what you make it" and my sister is someone who realized that she is the only person that can control her happiness. Micheal Adam Street is the best thing that has happened to my family because of the decision my sister made by following her heart. From being a normal pregnant woman, having a life or death birth, who my sister Alex is today, I am proud to call her my sister and person I can call an inspiration. Alex's choice to make a decision for herself and what her heart wanted is something I admire. My sister has shown me how to love unconditionally and love deeply. Her decision to keep her baby and Micheal being her very best friend today was the best decision she has ever made for herself and has taught me to make decisions for myself and follow what my heart wants. Today, Micheal is a happy and healthy one and a half year old who had the chance to live because his mother decided to follow her heart no matter what others think. He is the greatest blessing and life lesson I have ever received.

Identity



Mental Illness and Family

Kartyr Bigham

Strained relationships are very common in relation to mental illness and family members. It can affect the whole family, creating issues that will reside with the individual/s for a lifetime. It may not always be intentional, but you have to learn how to deal with the person with mental illness or get out of the situation. We often are trying to find ways to relieve the emotional pain, trying to get support, or understand the situation, even if we don't speak out. The book *Educated* by Tara Westover was really one that hit home with me. Up until this year I was in a family situation that wasn't nearly as extreme as hers, but it was still very relatable to her memoir considering all her family issues caused by mental illness. Tara Westover was an intellectually deprived little girl, who was born into a survivalist family. She was struggling to break away from her family as she faced being severely isolated because of her father's underlying psychological issues. The physical and mental abuse that occurred throughout the book took a piece of her innocence, as well as her emotional well being. It takes a very strong person to break away from all they have ever known. To further that she was trying to have the privilege of getting an education when she never stepped foot into a school, until her college years. Although, it is a very inspiring story about how you can change the person you are, no matter what family you were born in, she seemed to fight the urge of trying to go back to her roots once she left. Tara's book is a powerful memoir that makes me question how she turned a bad situation good and is still somehow sane. From someone who has many factors of mental illness in her family, I completely understand what it is like to go through emotionally driven situations, as there are many in this book. Like Tara, I have realized that you just have to make the best out of a situation. Tara got out of her situation and her family, while I realized that my situation is better off with me just being in a different household. Something that I really relate to is the fact that she fights going back to the people who hurt her, while still continuing to love them.

Considering the fact that we all tend to have our issues, some psychological issues can end up affecting the wellbeing of others surrounding us or the way we treat them. Mental illness in family can destroy existing relationships, and sometimes make it to a point of no return. Sad to say, most families don't know how to cope with other members that deal with mental illness and it usually digs a hole way deeper than before. The constant battle of verbal abuse led by Tara's brother Shawn, exemplified how our personal psychological issues can affect the wellbeing of others. Tara stated in her book that "Shawn had called me a n****r that entire summer: "N****r, run and fetch those c-clamps!" (Westover 177. Belittling and name calling is enough to shatter any existing relationship, even if no physical interaction was involved. The constant name calling and the cruel things Shawn said was enough to hurt any prior relationship they had. Tara also states this quote, "It's strange how you give the people you love so much power over you." This was about her brother Shawn and how his words would overpower her emotional wellbeing. The constant overpowering can make you feel like you have no control of your life. Sadly enough, she would act as if it didn't get to her, but that sometimes creates further issues avoiding the problem. I relate to this quote from *Educated* greatly because I love my mom to death, but she sometimes lashes out on others around her. I know deep down she means well, but it doesn't always come out that way. For me, my mother was my biggest supporter and my greatest enemy. She would be the first to fight for me and the first to get to me

emotionally. I know for a fact, she does love me but her sense of love is just not felt like “normal” people feel. I firmly believe she reacts this way because she feels like she has no control over her life and lashes out on who she knows will react the most. It gives her a sense of control in her life, as it did to Shawn. The connection between Tara’s and my experience shows that mental illness can, in fact, destroy family relationships and stick notions in our head that can last a lifetime.

The annoyance of Tara going back to her family time after time is a considerably hard concept to understand. But this is a common theme in the book with not only her but others. It is very easy to get frustrated with Tara’s habits, and not understand why she keeps going back to her recurring nightmare. People in abusive relationships favor going back to their abusers, keeping in mind that they feel like they have little control over their own lives. Abusers tend to be master manipulators, and the victim is usually becomes dependent on them for various reasons. Sometimes leaving isn't always the easiest option, especially if it is putting you financially or physically in harm's way. From the outsider perspective it's hard to understand why they keep going back until you've been put in a situation in comparison. A good example of this is when Shawn's girlfriend kept going back to him even though he would hurt her. One quote from the book said “Once she had talked back to Shawn-just a little, she said, as if her manners were on trial- he’d ripped her from her house and slammed her head against a brick wall so hard she thought he was going to kill her. His hands locked around her throat. *I was lucky, she wrote. I had screamed before he began choking me, and my grandpa heard it and stopped him in time*” (Westover 295). After this she continued to be around him. I have had multiple friends who have Went back to abusive relationships. One experience in particular is my mom's good friend. She has been with this guy even though she’s caught him cheating and lying and breaking her self esteem down. Layla always goes back even when we have told her that her relationship is going to be the death of her. Love seems to always overrule our rationality. What I’ve witnessed from others is that the victim usually stays due to the fact that it wasn't like this in the beginning. Hope is commonly seen for the person they once were. I believe that Tara expects a different outcome following her visits. Which continually, ends up being the same thing every single time. As frustrating as it is, it takes quite a few times of going back for someone to leave for good.

A common controversial question, on the topic of mental illness, is if it’s caused by environmental or genetic factors? Sometimes it can be both, being the environmental really brings out those negative traits. A huge example of this is the way her Father and Shawn were so seemingly alike. Throughout the text we couldn't tell if Shawn learned these habits through the dad or if he just was reacting on his own. A lot of those habits that he created did come from the father and got worse because his actions never had consequences. Shawn and his dad would feed off of each other and furthermore, the father couldn't ever see the abuse that Shawn was portraying towards Tara. My favorite quote to show how both Shawn and the Dad are alike is through this interaction one evening in the junkyard “A few days later Dad came home with the most frightening machine I’ve ever seen. He called it the Shear. At first glance it appeared to be a three-ton pair of scissors, and this turned out to be exactly what it was. The blades were made of dense iron, twelve inches thick and five feet across. They cut not by sharpness but by force and mass. [...] Dad had dreamed up many dangerous schemes over the years, but this was the first that really shocked me. Perhaps it was the obvious lethality of it, the certainty that a wrong move would cost a limb. Or maybe that it was utterly unnecessary. It was indulgent. Like a toy, if

a toy could take your head off. Shawn called it a death machine and said Dad had lost what little sense he'd ever had. "Are you trying to kill someone?" he said. "Because I got a gun in my truck that will make a lot less mess." Dad couldn't suppress his grin. I'd never seen him so enraptured." (Westover 138). The fact that the Dad didn't even blink an eye on how dangerous the "Shears" were, he fed into Shawn and his toxic ways saying that he has a gun that would make a huge mess. This is a prime example on how they think alike and try to get an emotional pull out of Tara. Normal families don't joke about those situations, especially when they know someone bothered by it. Reading the book really shows how dangerous the situation could have been. An example from my life that shows that it is environmental and genetic, is how my grandpa and my mom are so similarly alike. There are certain things that she learned from him while there are some traits that couldn't be learned. ADHD is a good one. They both have that mental illness and it is not learned you are born with it, while their OCD is learned by their parents. My mom definitely learned that from him. The development of mental illness is hardly ever caused by one single thing, people usually misconceive that. It can be influenced by traumatic events, passed down the blood line, or learned through our environment. This development can make the day to day living hard especially on those around you. As they get older it tends to appear more than it used to. Tara's father was a prime example of that, his paranoia got worse as he was older, as did Shawn's abusiveness which they blamed on brain injury.

Mental illness and emotional abuse can affect later relationships in life. Tara's idea of relationships is screwed up because of her family ways. The constant going back and forth between I love you and I hate you, took a huge piece of her life and never gave her any stability. They should be built on love and support, not in the way her family was built. Her father would even go to extremes saying that Tara was the devil; that really drove her away from her father. Tara struggled throughout the book with relationships. With her professors, and with potential boyfriends. She didn't know how to react to love and praise. She didn't think she deserved it and was better at reacting to negativity. To give an example on how Tara would have rather had criticism than praise, here's a conversation between one of her professors and her "I have been teaching at Cambridge for thirty years," he said "And this is one of the best essays I've ever read." I was prepared for insults but not for this" (Westover 240.) The way her father and Shawn treated her manipulated all relationships after her mistreatment, and left a permanent impact on her and the way she would act towards others. From my experience it is hard for me to love and feel normal emotions because the people I'm around don't show those things normally. I grew up in a very tough love home. This has created a lot of issues with me and I'm positive that Tara feels the negative impacts of this in her life too. It's hard to try to get used to something that you are not used to. It is also hard to keep relationships because we don't know how to feel or to express things properly. Emotional abuse can be traumatic to the victim and give them lasting effects after they have left that situation.

Mental illness is a hard subject to understand and will never fully be understood. It is really hard to deal with if you are in that situation and you won't ever understand it until you're in that situation. It is stories, similar to Tara's, that will inspire others to be more open about mental illnesses. Mental illness, is something that isn't really touched based on, or showed how to deal with someone who has one. Everyone just acts like it doesn't exist and it's not a common thing. The least we can do is raise awareness and try to be there for those who are constantly battling this difficult ailment. It is very hard to deal with the illness or someone who has one.

The book *Educated* gives great insight on how mental illness is hard to deal with and overcome. This story gave me inspiration, that you can overcome the bad even when dealing with family issues. It can be extremely exhausting, and unmotivating but you can overcome it. Tara went on to do amazing things even though her past still impacts and makes her who she is today. Another thing I love about *Educated* is that it conveys how Tara got out of an extreme situation, but how she still continues to love her family and struggles with wanting to go back. I left my household and I still continue to love my family and go back even with the situations I have been through. It really shows that it is okay to love people who can hurt and care for you the most.

Moving Forward

By Rowan Graham

I wish they made Father's Day cards for crappy dad's. One that says "We may be biologically related, but the only emotional attachment I have to you is anger. Happy Father's Day! You shitty human being!" My father was a real asshole. When I was in 7th grade I went to visit him for the summer. During this time he lived in Chicago, Illinois. The summer visit ended up turning into a year. I stayed with him, his wife, and step-daughter. While I was there they all treated me like Cinderella. They made me clean the house everyday after school and I wasn't allowed to leave the house. I couldn't have a phone. I would sneak my step sister's phone to call my siblings. When I finally stood up for myself and told my dad I wanted to go back home to my mother's house we got into an altercation which, that led to him hitting me with a broom. I left the house and ran down the street to a corner store, called my mother and told her what had happened. She called my father and told him if he would not bring me back home she was going to call the police. A week later he took me home. Tara Westover, the author of *Educated*, and I both had fathers whom we looked up to as children and whom we loved dearly but we had to cut them off completely because of how toxic they were.

Our father's showed patterns of abusive behavior. Tara Westover's father didn't want her to go to school, he wanted her to believe what he believes, without any question, he wanted her to be saved by God, he belittled her choices and threatened to destabilize the life she's making for herself. She used to put up with him through his ups and downs, however, after he failed to defend her against her brother, Shawn, she had enough. She realized that in order for her to truly love her father again she must cut him off completely. I do love my father, that is why I, too, had to cut him out of my life. My father has never been a reasonable guy, It's always been his way or the highway. My father didn't like that fact that I was going away to school, he said I would not make it. I'd be back at my mother's house in no time, just like the rest of her kids. My father called me ugly names, such as "dumb" and "stupid", he even put his hands on me. For my 15th birthday he choked me until I turned purple, because I wanted to hang with my friends. Most importantly he taught me to never trust anybody, especially him.

Westover and I grew up in the church, believing in "God's will." Westover was born to Mormon fundamentalist- *a belief in the validity of selected fundamental aspects of Mormonism*. In her memoir she wrote, "They believed in modesty; we practiced it. They believed in God's power to heal; we left our injuries in God's hands. They believed in preparing for the Second Coming; we were actually prepared. For as long as I could remember, I'd known that the members of my own family were the only true Mormons I had ever known" (159). My upbringing was in a Baptist Church. My family and I went every other day including all day Sunday. My family was one of the fakest Christians I knew. My father broke plenty of laws that's why he was always in and out of jail. My mother's mouth was just not holy at all, she cursed like a sailor. My siblings would fight all the time at school, and I was just so sneaky, that nobody would even consider me a bad child. Westover decided to study it and I just don't believe everything that's in the bible. Our fathers were abusive because of their beliefs, they believed that women should not wear certain clothes or they would be considered "whores". Their beliefs affected us so much we had to take a step back and look at religion from our own perspective.

As we got older, we saw the world differently. Westover grew up to realize that everything her father taught her was based on his beliefs. Westover and her father both aged,

but only she changed. Her father is still the same man he was when she was a child. Westover stated “I am not the child my father raised, but he is the father who raised her”(328). My father did not raise me, my mother did it all on her own. What my father did was try to interfere with my life. He always said to me that he didn’t want me to be like my siblings because “they ain’t good for nothing.” Meaning he believed we would never be anything in life. The crazy part is he always said “I am just like them.” He told me I was a waste of a seed, he loved telling me what to do, but I got older and wanted to do what I wanted. When we got into minor arguments he’d always say “you know how your dad is!” Yes, I knew how he was but he never knew how I was. Westover and I both came out stronger in the end, and we both have matured because we always had to be the mature one in the relationship with our fathers.

Until we let go of the toxic people in our lives, we will never be able to grow into our fullest potential. We had to let our father’s go so we could grow. Westover hits it on the head with her quote, “You can love someone and still choose to say goodbye to them. You can miss a person every day, and still be glad that they are no longer in your life”(). I can relate to this because I love my father more than words can explain but I don’t want him in my life because he is a very toxic person to be around. Both of our fathers were very toxic in their own way. Westover’s father controlled her by not letting her talk to boys or wear certain things, he manipulated her into believing what he wanted her to believe . My father was controlling by making me call him everyday. If I didn’t he would call all my family and just ultimately do too much, like this one time he called my mother saying I said I was going to hurt myself. When he lived with my mother and me he would hit me if I wasn’t listening or if I was talking back.

When something bad happens you have three choices, you can either let it define you, let it destroy you, or can let it strengthen you. Westover scratched the line, “None but ourselves can free our minds” (258) by Bob Marley, in her notebook. Because of the lyrics she had finally understood that she had not yet found the courage to live in her new life because her old one was holding her back. Westover had to learn who she was and how to cut her father out of her life in order to do what's best for herself. Westover said “Until the moment she had always been there. No matter how much I appeared to have changed- how illustrious my education, how altered my appearance- I was still her. At best I was two people, a fractured mind. She was inside, and emerged whenever I crossed the threshold of my father’s house” (328). When I was younger I’d sit up crying at night asking myself what did I do wrong for my father to have so much rage towards me, why wasn’t he loving like other fathers, why didn’t he believed in me. Over the years I had to learn to forgive my father for all he had done to me. I did not forgive him for his sake but for mine. Forgiving him, lifted so much weight off of my shoulders, releasing me from the pain. The day of my High School graduation I realized I had to let my father go because I felt like he wasn’t at my graduation to support me, he was there because he had to be. Westover and I wanted the abuse with our father’s to stop so we had to make a change and it has to start within ourselves. We had to realize our true potential and understand the toxicity of our fathers.

Goodbye is the hardest thing to say to someone who means the world to you, especially when goodbye isn’t what you want, but it's what you have to do. Westover and I both were abused by our father’s at a young age. When we grew up we had to realize that we had to let them go for our own happiness and because of that we are now grown and on a good path to living the lives we hoped for. Sometimes we’ll think about what our lives would have been like without them, it’s going to be hard because so much of who we are now is due to them. But God

has and will always be there to guide us through, even the toughest of times.

The Reality of Police Action

By Adam Ebrecht

Over the years police have reigned control over how they arrest. What they're told to do in the situation, what they need to do, and what they actually do are different. Situations escalate and then, in turn, see riots and innocents being killed by some officer with a gun and an easy trigger finger. These situations can be the defining moment that changes someone's life, whether they live or die. Thema Bryant-Davis and contributing authors understood this when writing the article "The Trauma Lens of Police Violence against Racial and Ethnic Minorities". Author Zachary A. Schaefer understood that communication between police and society is complicated, and the way that police are perceived on social media is influenced by young generations. He wrote about this in the article "Secretly recording the police: The confluence of communication, culture, and technology in the public sphere". Most of the people incarcerated today are black men who have been demonized by stereotypes, this is talked about in the article "From 'brute' to 'thug': The demonization and criminalization of unarmed black male victims in America" by Calvin John Smiley and David Fakunle. That's why police brutality needs to be dealt with, so police don't get the opportunity to play God with someone's life, just because they may or may not be armed.

There needs to be better training for officers when dealing with situations that concern race. The better we train police officers the better the chances of lowering the kill rate in police-related events. Bryant-Davis discusses the problem of race-related events and lack of sensitivity training, "Police are armed and trained to defuse crisis; yet, many of the police officers accused and, in rare cases convicted of, unwarranted violence report being afraid of ethnic minorities who in most cases are unarmed and outnumbered." (853). Police officers are quick to judge based on race, admitting to being afraid is admitting to being uneducated or untrained to face a situation. How can one expect their life to be safe in the hands of someone who is afraid of them just because of how they look. The reality is most people of color are more afraid of the police than the police are of them. When officers don't have the proper training they cannot be expected to protect the people and uphold justice.

There need to be taken into consideration when police interact with people of color. A lot of the time police don't treat people of color like they would someone who was white. People of color have been demonized and stereotyped for years and it only gets worse. Calvin John Smiley and David Fakunle in the article argue "Regardless of evidence or facts, White mobs would seize Black defendants or attack Black neighborhoods to seek revenge for this crime" (353). While this is referring to white supremacy and how they dealt with the myths and lies spread about people of color, the dynamic of this relationship has not changed but rather evolved to fit the time period. Now recognized as police brutality and racial discrimination. This only leads to more problems and conflicts among social classes.

Mobile technology has proven that police brutality is an ongoing problem for every black person. In the article, Zachary A. Schaefer brings to attention that "another consequence of the police brutality videos is that several states have changed their laws to make the unauthorized videotaping of a police officer a felony" (199). These changes in laws can only cause more problems among people. When police silence the voices of the people, their freedom of speech is then away. When the police are able to revoke the rights of people they are then able to control the people. The act of controlling the people creates an imbalanced power dynamic between

people and police. Police may develop the idea that they are better, that their lives and rights matter more. Power may go to their head. Mobile technology creates a surplus of evidence of police brutality, the cops don't want to be recognized as dementors and rather those who uphold peace. This allows for police to limit the availability of these videos considering it shows them in the worst light.

Police Brutality has sparked things like the #BlackLivesMatter protest that began in Ferguson, Missouri. The police department in Ferguson, Missouri had to deal with a black teen who was shot because the officer thought Brown had a gun. His name was Micheal Brown and he was 18 at the time. The whole event lead to a protest after the event took place, police had a curfew because black people were shooting police cars during the night. It's events like this that lead to rioting. Bryant-Davis states, "The homicide indictment rate for citizens is 90% but the indictment rate for police officers is 1%"(cite). Some may argue that this only happens because the cops must think instantly and on their feet, that a second can mean life or death. While this may be true, it still leads back to improper training. Cases such this where a very obviously unarmed black male has been shot and killed for no reason or beaten in the streets. It is instances like this that need justice, where the officers in question deserve to be brought down, they deserve conviction to face the penalty for their crimes. How is it that police officers are suddenly better than everyday citizens, but at the end of the day when they take off their badge they too are everyday citizens.

Police brutality is something that was started in the era of segregation and has continued to the present itself today. Brutality itself is a key threat to black and other ethnic minorities. The average black individual will worry about whether or not they will get shot or arrested over a simple traffic stop. At a young age, parents teach their kids to put their hand up and to make sure that they have their license and insurance. The final thing they tell their children is to say to the officer that they are unarmed. And yet even all of these precautions don't save them. They face criminalization and discrimination every time they get accused of stealing, selling drugs, or sexual assault. Some children are treated differently because of their ethnic background, they are raised differently and taught differently just so they can live their life almost normally. When these people are basically destined to live in poverty or low-income areas that face gang-related violence and police-related violence. Who can they turn to if not the police? Police brutality will only continue, it's a historical truth, but future generations can change it.

Finding Your Identity

By Sisi Key

"You're not allowed to be sad." "Stop acting so immature." "Be a Lady." "There is no room for failure in this family." "We're depending on you." These are all things my family has said to me over the years. These are all very high expectations to place on to a child and expect them to uphold. Those that could break them with the constant pressures put on them by the expectations of their family and cause a struggle with their identity. This is something that Tara Westover is conflicted within her novel, *Educated*, an autobiography about Westover's venture from an isolated mountain in Idaho to earning her Ph.D. at Cambridge while also going against her family's beliefs. In our society, we are assigned our identity by others particularly by family and as people enter the world on their own, away from family, they often learn things that differ from their family's beliefs. This is where the question of, "how do you form an identity outside of your family's expectations." comes into play.

Women are scrutinized to the point where it feels like they are under a microscope. When you're told that one thing makes you feminine and the other thing you enjoy does not it can be very disheartening. You feel guilty for liking something that is not traditionally feminine. These are principles that are held even past childhood and could carry on into adulthood. These ideas hurt and are more impactful when they are placed on your shoulders by family. In chapters 27: *If I Were a Woman*, Tara Westover contemplates her femininity, "I'd been wondering whether something was wrong with me since the beginning of the semester when I'd attended my first lecture on world affairs. I'd been wondering how I could be a woman and yet be drawn to unwomanly things." (Westover 249). In a similar experience, before I discovered that I was nonbinary, thoughts like these plagued me. Nothing could alleviate the constant worry that I was not feminine enough especially from the constraints put on me by my mother. To this day I can feel the pinch on my skin and hear her voice whispering in my ear every time I do something that she would consider unladylike, "Cross your legs." "Stand up straight." "Smile." Now that I am out of the house and have tasted the freedom of being my own person, I will never go back to the person she wanted me to be.

The sexualization of feminine presenting people is inescapable even in our modern society and its effects on me have been dramatic. Family members often push the concept of modesty and shame of our young bodies to "protect us." These harmful thoughts continue as we develop from children into adults. An example of this is when Westover is confused about the over-sexualization of herself in Chapters 8: *Tiny Harlots*, "That Wednesday, I wore the leotard and tights with my gray T-shirt over the top. The T-shirt reached almost to my knees, but even so, I was ashamed to see so much of my legs. Dad said a righteous woman never shows anything above her ankle," (Westover 89) and 15: *No More a Child*, "I wanted to obey. I meant to. But the afternoon was so hot, the breeze on my arms was so welcome. It was just a few inches. I was covered from my temples to my toes in grime. It would take me half an hour that night to dig the black dirt out of my nostrils and ears. I didn't feel like an object of desire or temptation. I felt like a human forklift. How could an inch of skin matter." (Westover 172). I remember the change from when I was no longer considered a child in the eyes of the world. I was about 11 years old. Puberty had come faster to me than it did for others. I had breasts now. Grown men catcalled me. My mom told me I was no longer allowed to wear shorts around male family members. I was told to get dressed if I was wearing a tank top and pajama shorts. "It's not ladylike," echoes

through my mind every time I think of it. Tara, mine, and all feminine presenting people's experiences are the same or very similar. We come of age and suddenly we are sexualized. It's confusing and downright disgusting. The best we can do is stop the never-ending cycle that is the patriarchy.

Questioning something that has always been given to you as fact, such as religion, is difficult. Not only because it's the only thing you've ever known. It's one of the first things that is used to define you as a person. Tara ponders over whether or not her faith should define her or herself in Chapter 29: Graduation, "I searched my mind and discovered a new conviction there: I would never be a plural wife. A voice declared the with unyielding finality; the declaration made me tremble. What if God commanded it? I asked. You wouldn't do it, the voice answered. And I knew it was true." (Westover 267) Going against your faith and what you are taught is the hardest and most courageous thing you can do. It's also very conflicting. I have struggled with my faith. Questioning how I could be gay if God doesn't accept that. I came to peace with it when I found out that God loves everyone that's his thing and I shouldn't worry.

There's a point in your life where you have to draw a line between your family and you. It doesn't necessarily have to be dramatic and you don't have to hate your family. It's simply establishing your identity and not standing down on your beliefs. This can be seen in chapter 36: Four Long Arms Whirling, Westover reclaims her identity "The blessing was a mercy. He was offering me the same terms of surrender he had offered my sister. I imagined what a relief it must have been for her to realize she could trade her reality, the one she shared with me, for his. How grateful she must have felt to pay such a modest price for her betrayal. I could not judge her for her choice, but in that moment I knew I could not choose it for myself." (Westover 372). This is when Westover finally takes her stance against her family. She comes to realize that her choices and opinions are just as valid as anyone else's in her family. We all have this moment. This is the moment when we separate our beliefs from our families. You create your own identity. Coming out as nonbinary and pansexual was when I finally claimed my identity.

We all struggle with our identities. We form these thoughts, opinions, and ideals from the environment that we surround ourselves with. It is human nature to do so. Adding families in the mix can often make it even more complicated. The identity struggle was a recurring theme in the novel, *Educated*, by Tara Westover. So the answer to, "How do you form an identity outside your family's expectations?" You do it with courage and with the self-reassurance that it is what's best for you because if anyone knows what's best for you and how you should live your life it's yourself.

Education's Worth

By Shaunte Lanham

As a mother with children in the school system, I've become a little skeptical on how education has evolved. My everyday struggle with my sons' school has opened my eyes to a few problems that occur. I believe our first set back is how and what our children obtain outside the school system. The labeling and how certain labeled children are affected has a major impact on our children and their education. Russell Baker, author of "School vs. Education," talks about education outside of school and how this will affect our children in the future. Leonid Fridman, author of "America Needs Its Nerds," speaks on Americas' anti-intellectualism and how Americas' culture has not adapted. I mostly agree with both writers and would like to highlight how education outside of school affects our children, how labeling inside the school creates barriers, and how these issues will affect our children's education as a culture.

Education can come in all different shapes, sizes, or experiences. We learn not only in school, but in everything we do, there's always a learning experience. Russell Baker says, "By the age of six the average child will have completed the basic American education and will be ready to enter school. 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" (Baker 1). From parents to the outside world, our children are always watching and picking my bad habits up that they will use as they grow, if not told any different. What we allow our children to be involved in become what they know. Before school starts, our children are being educated every day, and it's up to us as elders to teach them the right way in life and allow education that will help their futures. My son has helped me realize that my everyday life affected his life and education. As he was growing up, I had to change certain habits in my life such as running the streets, using drugs, and being abused because my son was watching and picking certain habits up. As a mother I made the decision to make a change so I wasn't educating him in a non-moral way or allowing him to think these bad habits were okay. I had to teach him to be respectful towards humans and teach him that what his father was doing wasn't okay. I had to educate my son in a better way so I wasn't setting him up for failure in the future. I learned that education can be in any experience or just in everyday life and it starts with us as parents.

As our children grow, moving on to the next stage of education in school, labeling creates a great impact on education. Russell Baker states that, "Early in this stage, the child learns that he/she is either dumb or smart" (Baker 1). What about when Leonid Fridman says, "Nerds are ostracized while athletes are idolized" (Fridman 1). Both these quotes point out very vivid barriers our children deal with in the school system. As the teachers and students begin to label each other, our children begin to have a mindset that being smart is abnormal. I've dealt with this personally with my son and his school district. It came to my knowledge that my child was being over looked in his class because he was having out bursts in class. With no answers to why he was being labeled as a trouble maker, I started setting up meetings and trying to figure out what was causing this change. As a mother trying to further her own education, I didn't condone being in trouble, snapping out, or even being disrespectful, but these were all issues I'd never seen from my child. Phone call after phone call, meeting after meeting, and problem after problem, we finally found an answer. My child was bored with the work he was being given and needed something more to occupy his time. He needed an out source when he'd get frustrated

instead of allowing the out bursts. After sitting in class and actually putting my foot down and saying, “I will not accept this, my child is here to learn, and if I have to sit at school every day until we find a happy medium for his education, I will.” Now my child is at the top of his class with no concerns, but because my child was labeled, he wasn’t receiving the education I felt he needed or deserved. From all of this I learned that sometimes we have to be the force behind and speak up or our children will suffer and not get the education they deserve. I’ll be damned in my child gets pushed to the side because of a label they placed on him as an excuse to overlook his education.

As we see these things change, I wonder what it will do to our society as a whole. Leonid Fridman states, “In most industrialized nations, not least of all our economic rivals in east Asia, a kid who studies hard is lauded and held up as an example to other students.” Fridman continues and states, “Americas culture has not adapted to the demands of our times, to economic realities that demand a highly educated workforce and innovative intelligent leadership” (Fridman 1). I definitely agree that as we continue to grow as a society where education is shunned or dumbed down to make it easier for our children, how will America continue to move forward? As an adult that has been out of school for ten years, returning to finish a degree I had put on hold has not been easy. I chose to come back to school because my education hadn’t adapted to the demands of society. I have had to open my eyes and realize if I want to adapt and cultivate, then education is key. As a mother I make sure to push my children’s education and push them to do their best, no matter what anyone thinks. I don’t want my children to be in my shoes after school because they were overlooked and no one took the time to stand up for me. For my children I want them to excel in school and to push forward in their education. I’ve learned if we continue to push social skills instead of education and intellectualism, we will continue to fall to the bottom of the totem pole of the world’s classes and the education culture.

As much as I love to learn, I definitely feel like education in school has changed and our children are being cast out or passed by. From my experiences in school to my children’s fight for education, I’ve had to open my eyes and become a voice. From the outside world to inside the school, we should all want our children to get a better education and to have more opportunities than we had. To do that we need to push education in our society and realize for our country to continue to grow as a whole, we need to focus more on teaching and pushing education before we can no longer stay with the rest of the world’s societies and fail ourselves. I’ve learned things are progressing every day and if we continue to let our children be educated in the wrong ways outside of school, and continue to allow the labeling, then we as a society will fail as a whole because social skills aren’t going to teach us everything we need to survive and grow. There’s always something to learn to continue to educate ourselves and our children.

Manipulation

By Michael Lauer

I believe in life that one of the most important things to take care of is your relationship with your family and friends. A good relationship with your family & friends can have several benefits. Family will love you unconditionally, and friends will be supportive no matter the circumstance. However, not all relationships are healthy. One of the biggest ways that relationships are ruined in today's world, is by manipulation. Manipulation is a type of social influence that attempts to directly or indirectly change someone's course of actions. In the book *Educated* by Tara Westover, she goes into detail about how her father is manipulative towards her entire family. This manipulation, lead to Tara essentially disconnected completely from her family, even to the point where when she needed to contact the family to get tax documents to apply for financial aid, that she attempted to sneak into the house to avoid contact with her family, which ultimately failed. The same case is seen earlier in the book as well, with Tara's brother Tyler also disconnecting from the family to attend a higher form of education. I've seen this type of dangerous manipulation in my own personal life as well.

One instance of Tara's father's manipulation is when returning from a family trip home from Arizona, the Westover family is involved in a car accident. The entire family suffered injuries, however Tara's mothers seemed to have suffered the worst. She lost consciousness after the crash, and suffered severe head and eye injuries. When asked if they should take her to a hospital, the father simply just said "doctors can't do anything anyhow. She's in god's hands now." (Westover 39) He refused to take her to a hospital, because he was afraid that they would kill her, as well as he was afraid that the hospital would figure out that they were living on their own, off the radar, and report them to the government; which would inevitably lead them to getting in trouble. Another instance that we see of this, in the very same chapter, is her father was discussing with Tara's grandmother about her chemotherapy treatments. "Those doctors will just kill you quicker." (Westover 33) Once again, the father was trying to manipulate others so that his way of life could thrive, regardless of what dire consequences could occur. The father's way of life is what I would deem to be a toxic way, in which he doesn't trust the government because (as mentioned in the book constantly) he feels that they are out to "Get" him and his family. His manipulation is becoming so toxic to his family that he is beginning to push his family members away from him, such as with the cases of Tara and her brother leaving to go to college. Manipulation, when consistent, is a poison to relationships with both friends and family. When you manipulate someone, you're essentially removing their choice of free will, and their ability to determine for themselves what is right and wrong, which is what the father is going for in this case.

I've seen this type of manipulation in my own personal life as well. My uncle Trent, was living with my grandmother Kathy at the time when she was diagnosed with endometrial cancer. Endometrial cancer is a rare type of cancer in which the lining of the uterus becomes infected, and cells begin to grow out of control. According to the "Mayo Clinic", fewer than 200,000 Americans a year suffer. After consulting with my mother and her brothers, my grandma decided to undergo Chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is a treatment in which a cancer patient takes "Strong Chemicals" that are meant to kill fast-growing cells, those of which are found in cancer. Chemotherapy does have some harsh side effects, such as Nausea, and Soreness, however, these can easily be treated. Chemotherapy is simply the only type of treatment we have found to have

success against cancer.

My grandmother underwent treatments for around a year before we got the great news that she was in remission. Regular chemotherapy treatments had taken a toll on my grandma, she had lost her hair and had slight soreness for a while afterward. The important thing was, she SURVIVED. The chemo had done its job, and she was cancer-free, at least for the time. She was cancer-free for the next two years, in which she used her time to spend with her grandkids. Her cancer would return in the Spring of 2013, a little while after she had fully stopped treatments, and was only going to the doctor for regular checkups. This time, however, the tumor was slightly bigger than it had been the first time. She consulted with my mom's brother who lived with her at the time, who went against my mother and convinced her to not take any chemo treatments because "it would mess with his schedule." He manipulated my grandmother into no longer taking treatments, exactly how Tara's father was trying to do with her grandmother. The doctors gave my grandma less than a year to live. Her health deteriorated quicker than I had ever seen in my life. She quickly began to lose weight and became nearly unrecognizable. A lady that was once filled with so much life and love had quickly lost almost everything she once had, due to not treating her disease. She passed away in February of 2014, in her sleep, with my mother at her side as she had always been. My uncle had convinced her to stop her treatments which in turn caused my grandmother to lose her life. He was so caught up in his own life, that he didn't realize what consequences would occur due to his manipulation, which is the case in many scenarios. My mother and uncles still have not forgiven him for it; they still do not talk to this day. The case is the same with the Westover family. Tara's mother, almost for certain, has underlying brain issues from the major car accident that they went through.

Another scenario of manipulation in the Westover family, would be how the father tried to just push aside the abuse that Tara's brother Shawn gave to her. In the book, there are multiple scenarios where Shawn calls her various names like "Slut" and "Whore" to shame her, for little to no reason. It didn't stop at verbal abuse however, it turned into physical abuse as well. Shawn on multiple occasions had physically abused Tara, which lead her to believe "I'm only crying from the pain, from the pain in my wrist. Not from anything else." (Westover Chapter 12). She had convinced herself that her brother's consistent abusive behavior didn't bother her anymore. She was mentally hardened enough where the idea of him abusing her didn't hurt anymore, just the pain. Tara was manipulated to the point where physical abuse was no longer an issue to her; she believed that Shawn couldn't help what he did.

The physical abuse would continue into her later years as well. Tara would eventually return to the house to pick up tax documents which would allow her to apply for scholarships and financial aid for college. She tried to enter the house late in the evening, so she would be undetected and avoid any potential conflict she might have with her father. However, upon entering the house she was creepily greeted by Shawn who was sitting on the couch, holding a small knife. "The knife was small, only five or six inches long and very thin. The blade glowed crimson..... It was definitely blood. Not mine-he'd merely handed me the knife-But Whose?" (Westover Chapter 34). Shawn would go on to threaten Tara, for reasons unknown. "If you're smart, Siddle Lister, you'll use this on yourself. Because it will be better than what I'll do to you if you don't." Tara had been away for so long, she had forgotten just how bad the abuse from Shawn was. She finally realized how badly she was manipulated, and even began to wish that she was sixteen again so she wouldn't be hurt. Tara would confront her family about the abuse that Shawn had caused her in both her young years as well as late teen, and they played it off

as nothing major. They attempted to convince Tara that she was out of her mind, and that Shawn could not help the things that he did. Tara's mother also tried to give the excuse of "Shawn had a right to respect his family" (Westover Chapter 35). She also went on to say that the knife was never meant as a threat, and that Shawn attempted to make Tara "more comfortable" by giving her the knife, instead of holding onto it himself. A week later, the mother changed her story again and went as far as to say that Shawn never had a knife in the first place. Her mother told Tara, "Talking to you, your reality is so warped. It's like talking to someone who wasn't even there." Once again, we see another case in which the family is trying to alter the truth, in attempts to hide how badly toxic the relationships they have with each other are.

The manipulation would continue even after she had disconnected from the family and released the book. In an article written on *The Herald Journal* the family attorney came out and said, "The Westover family is disappointed that Tara would write a book that maligns them, their religion, their country, and homeschooling." Even after everything was said and done, and Tara finally had her chance to speak out on the situation, her parents-mainly her father- are purely focused on continuing their way of life, and saving their image. The family attorney would go on to say "Although there is a little germ of truth in *Educated*, the book falsely portrays the Westover family." which essentially called Tara a liar. However, the parents still continue to "stand by" their daughter. When asked if the family would take legal actions against Tara, the attorney said, "The Westovers love their daughter, and don't want to hurt her". While I believe this to an extent, I also feel it is a last ditch effort by the family in an attempt to save face, and to try and convince the media that their family is more complete than what Tara described in the book.

In a sense, I've seen a similar situation in my life. My parents were fantastic to me growing up, however; as with any house and family at points in time there were words exchanged that should never be exchanged between parents and kids. I once got into an argument with my mom, when I was around the age of seventeen, that lead us both to stepping over that line of what's okay and not okay to say. I had pushed and pushed my mom to the point where she was screaming in rage. She yelled "Go to hell!!" at me, which, me being a douchey teenager, at the time made me feel like I now had free range to say whatever I felt like would hurt her the most. I can still hear myself vividly in my mind, "I hate you mom! This is why dad is my favorite parent, and he doesn't even live here anymore!" Both my mom and I felt horrible at each other. We didn't talk for at the very least a day afterwards. When we did start talking to each other again, it was in short sentences in a conversation that you could tell we didn't want to be a part of. I eventually took her out to lunch, so we could talk things out, and mend our relationship; which we did. We never talked about the incident again. Nobody other than us ever knew what was said in that argument. Both her and I felt it wasn't necessary to tell anybody else because it might hurt how people view us. My family was always viewed as "Happy Go Lucky" and seemed like we never had any issues when in all reality we argued on a daily basis. I was fortunate to discuss my matters with my mother. Although we had different viewpoints, we were able to work through our issues, apologize to each other, and move on with our lives while continuing to improve our relationship. Tara on the other hand, wasn't that fortunate. She still had to deal with the consent pressure from her family to change what she believed to be the truth. With Tara the manipulation never ended until she left the family. She was never able to work out her issues with her mother and father, and the manipulation never stopped. If she went back to them, even in today's world, they would scold her as well as try to get her to tell the

public that her book was entirely false, once again, trying to manipulate her in an attempt to save their image as a “good Christian family” that is perfect in their relationships with each other, and can do no wrong.

I can relate very well to the manipulation that Tara Westover, in *Educated*, has been put through in her life. Both of us have been through traumatic experiences in which loved ones were hurt, and words were exchanged that could really harm a person’s mental health. I believe that there is a point where if a relationship with your family, or anybody for that matter is bad enough, that it is okay to cut ties with them and try to move on with your life. Toxic relationships can hinder your ability to work, educate yourself, and purely hinder your ability to enjoy life in general. It is okay to love somebody but be glad that you’re not around them anymore. Cutting out these toxic people, only benefit your life. Regardless of how hard it might be, sometimes you just need to let go.

Standardized Test

Brian Mackley

Albert Einstein once said, “Everybody’s a genius, but if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it would live its whole life believing that it is stupid.” This anecdote applies to any time a teacher makes a judgment about a student on their test scores. When a student gets a bad score, the teacher or the student themselves could believe they, the student, are stupid; but that is simply not the case. There have been many people around the world who seem ignorant, but have proven their intelligence. Tara Westover, a writer, and scholar who lived in the mountains of Idaho, never went to public school or high school, and still managed to get her Ph.D. In the memoir, *Educated* Westover states “The skills I was learning was a crucial one, the patience to read things I could not yet understand”(62). This meant that she was struggling at the time to read, but with learning meaningful skills made her succeed. Today’s modern education system focuses on standardized tests and uses them to determine the intelligence of a student, which is a problem because of the negative effects on students and teachers such as the loss of creative thinking, individuality, and killing the thought process of our students. As time moves forward, these crude tests shouldn’t be used to decide the future of our students, and instead, alternatives like stealth assessment should be used.

Standardized testing negatively impacts a student’s individuality. According to Daniel McGinn in his essay “The Big Score” he states, “Real learning is being shoved aside as teachers focus on boosting test scores” (172). In other words, McGinn is trying to express that teachers prioritize test scores over everything. I have experienced this first hand in high school. Whenever it came to testing time, all other learning was pushed aside. Instead of continuing to learn the material in the class and making our own judgments, we focused on one definite answer. The result of this killed the thought process of students. We as students should be learning the material in the class, rather than being forced to focus on our state requirements. Thus, teaching students what to think rather than how to think. This is an issue because it ruins individuality. Individuality defines the unique quality of a person. If a student cannot think on their own and thinking based off of someone else. It’s not what they’re thinking, it’s the ideas of whoever taught them.

There are various skills that can be taught to students during the school year, but many are postponed because of standardized tests. Alfie Kohn, author of, “The Schools Our Children” states, “Every hour that teachers feel compelled to try to raise test scores is an hour not spent helping kids become, critical, creative, curious thinkers” (qtd. In McGinn page 173). This means educators are more persistent on better test scores which are negatively impacting their teaching and beginning to affect other important aspects of learning. The skill of critical thinking, after all, is what puts some ahead of others. Critical thinking results in other useful skills for students like reasoning, observing, planning, and many more. For example, reasoning helps students figure out problems on their own, instead of being wired to know one definite answer a standardized test provides. Being able to observe helps someone know their surroundings and understand where danger might be. Someone able to properly plan will make them an organized person. There are many useful skills students should learn in school, but their time is wasted on standardized testing.

In addition to standardized tests punishing students; the teachers are punished as well. Daniel McGinn states in his essay “The Big Score,” “Kids can be held back, forced into summer

school or, under rules in 26 states, denied a diploma”(172). In other words, students are met with various negative consequences some being so bad that over half the states in the US denied a diploma due to low test scores. While the students are being penalized due to low scores, it is also affecting teachers. Some of them might lose pay or even get fired based on test scores. I have been around many teachers who changed their entire method of teaching whenever it was test time. This is not the teacher’s fault, they do what they can to maintain a steady job and live like everyone else. Standardized testing, salaries, job stability, and binding student’s performance together has led many teachers to undergo a lack of control over their work lives. This is causing them to prioritize testing over everything else which is a problem because students lose the skill of being creative thinkers that can help define their individuality.

Although standardized testing is the primary way to gauge intelligence, people have made alternatives such as the “stealth assessment,” which is better because it enforces useful skills students will use for life. The stealth assessment implements learning into a digital game by obscuring the difference between testing and learning. It can be argued that a well-developed stealth exam will efficiently support learning and help students grow. These do this by relieving the stress of taking a standardized test by putting it in the form of a game. Stealth exams give students opportunities to advance their skills in problem-solving, collaboration and give them the ability to demonstrate their persistence. Also, at the same time, they are gauging their intelligence. Working together and being able to rationalize conclusions is key to making a student's life successful.

Currently, in 2019, standardized testing is the meta to gauging intelligence. Gauging intelligence off a test is ignorant and will always negatively impact the level of teaching. It will always impact students in a negative way and will prevent bringing out their full potential. Students make up roughly 25 percent of our population in the United States, but also make up 100 percent of our future. Without the proper skills that need to be taught in school will lead to failure and if we continue to rely on a standardized test to gauge intelligence. We will never acknowledge those students with amazing potential, but lack the knowledge to apply themselves to schoolwork. However, if we do away with standardized tests then one day we will live in a world where fish no longer are attempting to climb trees.

Boys Will be Boys and Girls Will Behave

By Tori McIntire

The way we are raised and the things our parents say to us can stick with us our whole lives. In her book *Educated*, Tara Westover explains that she grew up in an extremely religious environment where women were subservient to their husbands and girls were raised to be future wives and mothers. While it is very damaging to girls to be told their futures are so limited while their brothers are not, it is also very damaging to boys to see their sisters and mother being treated as inferior. Tara's older brother, Shawn learned from this that women were lesser beings than him. He watched the way his mother and sisters were treated and believed this was the right way to treat all women. Shawn became abusive to his sisters when they would not allow him to control them. This also happened with his girlfriends and eventually his wife. I believe that he will continue to abuse his wife and possibly his children in the future because he was raised to think this was acceptable. Men who are raised to believe women are their inferiors will continue to teach this idea to their children potentially creating a cycle of toxic masculinity. We need to raise our daughters to be strong and independent but we also need to teach our sons to treat all women as their equals and with respect in order to break the cycle of toxic masculinity and abuse.

When girls are taught that the only way to be respectable is to be modest and cover themselves, it is not just damaging to the girls, but also to the boys around them who learn from this that they only have to respect modest women. Tara Westover was taught that only whores and ungodly women dress immodestly. Tara always remembered her father talking about a woman, Jeanette Barney, who bent over to pick something up in church. Her father, Gene, said "If a woman wears a blouse that low-cut, she ought not bend over. Jeanette waited to bend for that hymnal until I was looking. She wanted me to see" (Westover, 113). This taught Tara that any kind of immodesty was asking to be sexualized. Tara became so worried about being seen as immodest that she even worried about bending over immodestly. Tara says, "I was so preoccupied with not walking or bending or couching like them. But no one had ever taught me the modest way to bend over, so I was probably doing it the bad way" (Westover, 114). This was horrible for Tara. Her confidence was crushed and she was having a hard time figuring out how to go into the type of woman her family expected her to be while also trying to understand how a normal teenage girl would behave. But it also taught her brother, Shawn that he did not need to treat women with kindness or respect if they weren't modest enough and he even treated Tara cruelly at times. When Tara started to experiment with make-up, the way most girls do, Shawn saw her and said, "I thought you were better, but you're just like the rest" (Westover 114). Shawn started calling Tara "fish eyes" and even called her a whore when she wore lip gloss. When I was growing up, I was also taught that I was not respectable unless I was modest and feminine enough. My mom sexualized everything I did. I always had to wear dresses that came down to my knees, and I was not allowed to wear tight fitting clothes like jeans to school. My mom would call me a whore just for being friends with boys. This also hurt my brother who learned that he was too good to talk to girls or women who wore short dresses or lowcut tops. While my brother has never been violent with women, the way Tara's brother becomes, my brother still has skewed views of how to treat women. According to my family you don't have to be kind or respectful to a woman who doesn't respect herself enough to cover her body. I think it is completely wrong to choose not to treat someone with basic respect because of how they dress.

People should be allowed to look and dress however they want regardless of what another person thinks and we need to treat them with the same basic dignity and kindness. Its important that girls learn that they are worthy of respect no matter how they look, but we also need to teach boys to respect their sisters and female peers regardless of how they dress or what lifestyle they have.

When girls are taught that their place is at home and their only future is to be a wife and mother, it doesn't just limit the girls, it also teaches boys that they are superior to girls because boys are told they can choose what they want to do with their lives. Tara and Shawn's mother was always submissive and subservient to their father. She always did exactly what her husband told her even at the expense of the children. Their mother was not allowed to work outside the home until later on when her husband decided he wanted her to become a midwife. Tara's mother was an herbalist and made tinctures and oils to treat the family when they were sick or injured. She did not want to be a midwife but her husband decided she should be. When she told her husband she couldn't do it, he told her that it was God's will and said, "You need to be a midwife. You need to deliver a baby on your own" (Westover 16) She learned how to midwife because her husband told her to and because he thought it was God's will. Other than that, she stayed home and took care of her husband and children and didn't go anywhere unless her husband permitted it. Tara and her sister were raised to believe this was the only suitable future for them as well. From this, Shawn learned that he could control women, the way his father controlled his mother. Shawn liked to test his control on girlfriends by playing cruel games with them, Shawn told them do something, then changed what he said he wanted when they complied. For instance, he asked his girlfriend, Sadie for a Snickers bar. When she brought it, Shawn said, "What is this shit? I asked for a Milky Way" (Westover, 108). When she again complied, and brought the Milky Way, Shawn said, "Where's my Snickers? What you forgot again?" (Westover, 108) If she wouldn't comply, Shawn would punish her by ignoring her. When she did comply, Shawn pulled her on his lap and told her, "You have lovely eyes. Just like a fish." Shawn belittled Sadie and controlled her using praise and punishment. As a little girl, adults would say belittling things to me without realizing how creepy they sounded. If I made imaginary food in a toy kitchen they'd tell me I'd make a man happy one day, or if I played with a doll they'd tell me I was going to make a good mom and wife. To them it seemed completely normal to say but to me it felt wrong and sexist. They didn't tell my brother that he'd make a woman happy, or tell him what a good husband he would be. It was all just reinforcing the idea that girls grow up to be wives and mothers while boys grow up to have careers. When I was a teenager and I started working, men would come up to me and tell me that I'd be prettier if I smiled. If I complied, they would tell me "good girl", if I ignored them, they'd call me a stuck-up bitch. They thought women should be pretty and try to please people. They thought they could control me with a praise and punishment system. Boys need to learn that women are capable of more than just being wives and mothers. By teaching girls that they can be anything they want, we can show boys that girls are their equals.

When men have been brought up to believe women are their inferiors, some men grow up to be angry and even violent towards women when they don't adhere to his views of how women should dress or behave. Shawn became angry with Tara when she refused to get him a glass of water and was violent with her. Tara says, "He grabbed a fistful of my hair, a large clump... and dragged me to the bathroom... he lifted me off the ground, flattened my arms against my body, then dropped my head into the toilet." (Westover, 108). No one stopped Shawn

and the next time he was angry at her, he strangled her and called her a whore just because she talked to a boy. Shawn was also abusive to his girlfriends and later on to his wife, Emily. When Emily returned from the grocery store with the wrong kind of crackers, Shawn got angry and screamed at her. Tara says, “He’d gathered her up and flung her from their trailer, into a snowbank. She pounded at the door then she’d run up the hillside to the house. I stared at her bare feet as she said this. They were so red, they looked as if they’d been burned” (Westover, 262). Emily had no coat and no shoes, just an old t-shirt and jeans. It was an extremely cold night and Emily could have gotten frost bite or even frozen to death if she had slipped on the ice and gotten hurt. Tara’s family scolded Shawn but did nothing to help Emily get out of this abusive situation and she went back home under Shawn’s arm. I believe that Shawn will continue to be violent towards women and could potentially be abusive to his children in the future. I have had friends who were abused by their husband and didn’t think he would hurt their children, until it happened. Abusers don’t pick and choose who they will be cruel to, they just need the right trigger to set them off. I have known women who think that it was a one-time thing or that it was all their fault when their boyfriend or husband abuses them. I don’t believe there is ever an excuse to abuse someone no matter what they did wrong. Men who abuse women learned that that behavior was acceptable and will continue to be abusive. We need to raise our sons to understand that they have no right to put their hands on anyone else. We need to teach our daughters that they do not need to tolerate abusive behavior and boys have to learn that women are their equals and they have no right to attempt to control them.

The way children are raised will continue to reflect on their adult lives. By showing boys that women are inferior to them, we can potentially set them up for a life of skewed beliefs and possibly to be abusive toward women. We need to stop the cycle of toxic masculinity at its source by teaching our sons and daughters that they are equal and respectable regardless of gender. We need to break free of negative ideas instilled in us by our parents and find our own voice and opinions over the echo of theirs. Just like in *Educated* by Tara Westover, Tara had to physically leave her family in order to find her own voice and opinions but will probably continue to hear their ideas in her head throughout her life. We need to work on instilling positive traits in our own children so they won’t have to unlearn negative traits the way many of us did. I strive to show my niece that she is just as capable and strong as my son and I teach my son that there is strength in showing kindness. It is not good enough to only teach our daughters to be independent and bold. We have to also show our sons that girls are equal every bit as capable as they are if we want to end the cycle of toxic masculinity and abuse.

Holding on to my loved one

By Amra Muric

It is quite insane, isn't it? How much we tell ourselves the actions that we will never accept from a human being and then we do, we accept everything wrongfully done to us by a person or persons we love. In the book *Educated*, by Tara Westover, she comes into a lot of conflict with her family, specifically her brother Shawn and her parents. Shawn is one of her older brothers who has had abusive outbursts throughout the middle and end of the book. Her parents are abusive in the aspect of not being emotionally/mentally supportive as well as they do not believe any of the accusations that Tara brings up about Shawn, leading them to not be protective parents as they should be. Even through all the bad and pain these three have caused Tara, she continues to return home or try to keep in contact with her family. Why do we do this? We cling onto the thought of the safety this person used to give us, the nurture they once provided. We are captives in their nets, struggling to get out but never wanting to leave. I too, have experienced this love for a captive human being. Not in the way of it being my family member... but I wanted him to be my family member, forever, no matter how many beauty marks of purple color he left. They were beautiful to me at the time, walking around like an apple at an orchard that's been continuously dropped. I didn't see a single problem in my way of life and neither did Tara until her brother, Tyler, convinced her that she needed to get out of that house. There are many times when people do not either survive or make it out of these situations, but Tara and I have. We took the safety of our lives into our own hands, picked out pieces up and made something out of ourselves. In the end, after all the abuse has been silenced, Tara and I have survived and are doing so well for ourselves now. Tara has earned her PhD and now talks about her story to empower others to get out of terrible situations. I am now a full-time college student, successfully on my way to earning my Physical Therapist Assistant degree. I tell my story to those who are interested and hope to help others understand that being a hostage is not okay.

Tara and her family grew up in a mountain called Buck's Peak. They were isolated for most of their lives until later in the book whenever Tara's older brothers begin to leave to start their own families, then her sister, Audrey and then finally Tara breaks off and begins college at BYU. Tara initially decides to leave for college whenever Tyler sits her down and speaks with her saying, "There's a world out there Tara. And it will look a lot different once Dad is no longer whispering his view of it in your ear" (Westover 120-121). Around this time, she had already been getting abused by her brother, father and mother. Things were not going well at home at all. Shawn had started getting emotionally/mentally abusive. He had a girlfriend, Sadie, who was super into him would have literally done anything for him. This is first seen whenever Shawn, Sadie, Tara and Charles, a member of the school are applying a play called *Worm Creek*. She had set Shawn's abusive side off and brought it out. After that, everything went downhill. Shawn had started to become more abusive and having more outbursts. He had started to beat Tara more and even threatened to kill their older sister, Audrey. Shawn knew that he was twisted in some sort of way because he would always apologize to Tara after completing these actions but never thought to seek help. He even insisted on helping her install a lock that she had bought for her room. "We walked back to the house and he installed the lock, humming to himself and smiling, flashing his baby teeth." (Westover 121). Shawn knew exactly what he was doing whenever he had his outbursts but couldn't stop or control them so this was a way he

could help Tara protect herself against him.

My abuse started with a boy named Casey in Okinawa when I was stationed there in 2016. We hadn't known each other but a week before we started dating. Casey wanted to love just me all the time and spend a bunch of time with me, but little did I know, he was being possessive. It didn't take long to show me that he was a drunk, and of course, every time he got drunk it was constant fights, physical and verbal and sometimes even involved with unwanted sexual contact. But I thought no... this person that I love so so so much and they love me! I know they love me; could never ever hurt me this way. This wasn't him. It was my fault. I was doing something that would anger this human being that loved me so much that he had a reason to put his hands on me, to bruise me like an apple in an orchard. It wasn't even the marks that hurt, it was watching the person that I had chosen to love and who promised to never hurt me, hurt me in the cruelest ways. We used to hang out in his room, sleep there, we did everything there. I remember one night so vividly, every time I speak of it I feel like I'm there, in that room, eating those fists continuously until I'd find his fingers latched onto my neck, feeling my body get weaker as my knees gave in and I collapsed to the ground. We were watching "The Notebook" and everything was fine. He had been drinking and I stayed with him to comfort him as much as I could. The scene where Ella had started dating a new man was playing and he turned to me and said, "You'll never leave me, right? Because I don't know what I'd do if you did, I'd probably kill you and then I'd kill myself so that we could definitely be together forever." My face went cold. How could one say something like that like it was normal? "No, Casey, I'd never leave you. I hope that I have done enough to prove to you that I am here to stay forever" I said and at the end of my sentence, I caught a fist to my right cheek bone, and I winced in pain. And then another to the same spot and then another to my right nose bridge. I felt the blood from my nose bust run down my philtrum, coating my upper lip. The copper taste filled my mouth and red stained my teeth. "You'll never fucking leave me, I'll make sure no other man wants you besides me. Who would ever want a woman with a busted face?" he pranced around the room saying. I got up to wipe my nose and grab some ice so that the swelling would go down. The door to leave the room was right by the bathroom so when I walked by the door to go into the bathroom, he sprung at me with both hands wrapped around my neck and held on for dear life. I looked at him, the person I was madly in love with as he was draining me of air, of life like he always did. "You're not leaving me, I just said that you stupid bitch. What part of that don't you fucking understand?" he screamed in the face as I smelled his Wild Turkey breath. This one person who has caused me the most amount of pain harbored the most amount of love I've ever given. "I'm.... not... going anywhere Casey.. I love... you" I'd whispered through gasps of air and then he let go. "Oh, my goodness Amra, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to do that to you" Casey said as he teared up, noticing what he had done. And even after all of this happened, I continued to love him just as I had first laid eyes on him and felt all the butterflies rush through me. He was my person, no matter what he would do to me, I loved him, and I knew I was going to stay by his side forever.

The first encounter that Tara had of abuse were forms of verbal abuse. Shawn caught her putting on Aubrey's makeup which resulted in him saying, "I thought you were better. But you are just like the rest." (Westover 114). After that, Shawn stopped bonding with his sister so much and this is shown because he stops calling her Siddle Lister and begins to call her names whenever she wears makeup. "The first time I wore lip gloss, Shawn said I was a whore." (Westover 114) which lead Tara to feel insecure and wipe the gloss off. Tara's father also came

into the picture with this abuse. Whenever women would wear makeup or loose clothing, they were considered whores, and this was not accepted in their family. These are the types of actions that God didn't accept; therefore, they should not be done. Love has such an odd way of showing itself, doesn't it? We think we love the people in our lives, even if they have wronged us, who cares right? We don't want them to leave. Stay, we scream inside our heads but really, we beg for the protection, the love, the reassurance that they once offered. It's wild whenever someone puts their hands on you, but it is wilder when your safety net puts their hands on you. Tara awoke one morning with Shawn's hands, gripping her throat, screaming vowel names at her. "SLUT! WHORE!" (Westover 116) Shawn screamed. Choking, hands on abuse, screaming, names. Abuse. These words stick to me like gorilla glue between two pieces of wood. "I was yanked to my feet. Shawn grasped a fistful of my hair--- using the same method as before, catching the clump near my scalp so he could maneuver me---and dragged me into the hallway." (Westover 116) Control. It is all about control for these abusive people.

It was all about the amount of power these people can take from us until eventually, we take our lives, or they take our lives. Casey was also very verbally abusive. Name calling was his favorite wrapped with projecting blame. I had just made friends with someone in the building that he worked at and he saw that I was talking to this person. Later that evening, I had gotten home, and I could see it on Casey's face that he was not happy from the moment I walked in. Usually, I'm greeted with kisses and hugs, asking me how my day had gone. Bottles of Wild Turkey, Jack Daniels and Fireball sat on the desk where he was sitting, and I knew what he had been doing. "So, you like him, huh?" he asked as he took another gulp of Fireball. "Like who?" I answered with a puzzled look on my face, clearly not understanding who he was talking about. "Velasquez, you like him, don't you little whore? I saw you talking to him at work, I watched your giggle and he smile at the sight of your stupid manipulative giggle" he said. "No, Casey, that wasn't what it was, I promise. We were strictly talking about work" I answered his smirky comment. "What is so funny about work that you had to giggle, and he smile at something he told you? I don't understand, I don't think that work is funny. Why do you two think it's funny together? Do you want him? I know you do. Why don't you go be with him and stop playing with my feelings?" he asked. I was done with this childish conversation. I walked out of his room and down the hall to mine and didn't speak to him for the rest of the night. He felt the need to twist my situation that night and I wasn't having it. I swear, this is what fueled them, being able to take power from someone so vulnerable.

It was so difficult for Tara to get out because this is her family and that's all she had really ever known. Thankfully, her brother opened her eyes to more views and that is when Tara decided to attend college. As difficult college was for Tara, she made it through earning her PhD in history in 2014. She now lives a life where she speaks in interviews, explaining her dysfunctional family and the difficulties she experienced on her education journey. "The decisions I made after that moment were not the ones she would have made. They were the choices of a changed person, a new self. You could call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education." (Westover 329). Education is power to her and with that she was able to get away from abusive life. It was her transformation from the betrayal she received from her family.

Lifting was a huge outlet for me, if it wasn't for the gym, I would not have survived. I found strength within myself by taking my anger out on picking up heavy things and putting them down. Through this super terrible situation, I found myself. Today, I am a successful

Missouri Western State University student with two jobs. I am doing so well for myself and honestly, if I had not almost lost my life, I probably wouldn't have ever gotten away from him. My mental stability is at a such better state than it has ever been, I know what how I'm supposed to be treated and accept nothing less.

Abuse starts rising. It boils to the point where near death experiences begin to play a chapter within our stories. It accelerates so quick, before we can even blink this person that we found safety in becomes the biggest, most feared things within our lives. We try so hard to get away, move to a new area, pick up a new hobby to get our mind off of them and yet we still return to them whenever something great happens and we want to share that greatness or shit hits the fan and we don't know what else to do. Stockholm Syndrome is the realest thing I've ever seen or felt, and it destroys someone in every way that we allow it to. "There is a bonding that happens between victim and captor and there is no doubt that Tara was the victim to Shawn's twisted violent and abusive antics," said by Goal Auzeen Saedi in her article A memoir that asks us to deeply reflect on identity and family. That's exactly what it is though, a bond that we try so hard to hold on to, a bond that we would completely put ourselves through the most painful situations we've ever been to just to tell that person "No, it's okay, I'm here" and keep accepting the worst. We want to so badly forgive these painful actions that are done to us and we do for a while until it boils down to the point of us losing our lives. We forgive and turn a blind eye to what is going on again and again, only to watch it result into more dangerous actions. It must be me, must be something that I'm doing wrong which is why they're hurting me. If I had only not done this or maybe if I had done that different, they wouldn't have lashed out on me, so it is my fault that this is happening.

It does not matter what these humans do to us, how much hold and control we have within ourselves; Stockholm syndrome completely rapes us of every piece of control that we ever thought we had. It latches onto us with the safest, most loved people, it wraps itself around us like a blanket on the coldest day of winter. We never really understand why these people become so abusive. First, we think it is our fault... What did we do to anger this human so much to want to hurt me? They loved me, what did I do, I know it's me and not them. Did I talk to the wrong people, the people I shouldn't have that angered them? Or was it when I was finding the woman within myself that pushed them to the limit of beating me so badly that I couldn't walk. And we continue to accept what they're doing to us, despite all the times we look in the mirror and scream "NO MORE!!!!" to ourselves, over and over, we accept more and more. Hit me, scream at me, abuse me once more, again and again and we still look at you the same. We must stand up for ourselves just as Tara and I have stood up for ourselves. In Educated, Tara Westover removed herself from the situation by leaving the household and going to college far away and becoming her own person. I removed myself because I had almost died, and it was set in stone for us to be apart because of the criminal investigation that had occurred. It's not easy, it never is easy stripping us from these humans that we want to cling to so badly. We must completely remove ourselves from the situation. Strip ourselves of all the evil bearings around us and become a brand-new person on our own.

Masks

By Tadya Shaffer

We have all had a moment where we realize someone isn't who we thought they were. The book *Educated* tells a true story of how a young girl, Tara Westover, grew up in an almost cult-like family. The book follows how she learned that her family was very strange compared to others and how she learned the importance of education. After Westover left Buck's Peak and saw how normal people live, she begins to see the problems within her family. Eventually she saw her family members for who they truly are. Westover should have moved on from Buck's Peak a long time ago, she should've stopped trying to fix her family, and focused on her future. The fact she refuses to accept this leads me to believe that Westover has been brainwashed by her family and that they are likened to a cult. Evidence of this brainwashing is shown by her choice to move back home despite the danger it puts her in. I do not believe that the Westover's are inherently a cult, but they act more like a cult than they do a family. Westover has no reason to try and stay connected with her family at Buck's Peak. The only reason she tries to fix her relationship with them is because she has a false sense of loyalty to them due to being brainwashed. I don't believe that the Westover's are a cult but I believe that the family had the same effect a cult does on Tara Westover herself.

The Westover family is religious to a fault. Their way of thinking is harmful for a child. Westover's father refused pain medication despite being on the brink of death because of his religious views, and he also would refuse medication, doctors visits and schooling for his children. Westover's father was trying to get them to think that these normal everyday things were evil or "the devil's work." Alexandra Stein and Mary Russell define a cult as, "a cultic system is formed and controlled by a charismatic authoritarian leader or leadership body. It is a rigidly bounded, steeply hierarchical, isolating social system, supported and represented by a total, exclusive ideology. The leader sets in motion processes of coercive persuasion, designed to isolate and control followers" (18). The leader in Westover's case would be her father, and I admit they share numerous similarities with cultic behavior, but I don't believe the Westover's to be a cult, despite Westover's father's intentions for raising his children this way, he was still massively in the wrong, and made his family suffer when they didn't have to. Westover's father's way of thinking had scarred Westover and made her life very complicated changing the way she thought about the world around her.

Tara's parents and Shawn were very controlling of her actions, trying to make her do things the way they wanted. If Tara did something her father didn't like he would forbid her from that activity, or if Tara did something Shawn didn't like he would hurt her. This gave her very little freedom and with her being a child, she would think her elders were right and that whatever she had done must have been wrong. An example of Tara's father's controlling nature is when she was a kid he strictly forbid her from participating in dance class. This was Tara's account of that day: "The rest of the night was taken up by my father's lecture. He said Caroline's was one of Satan's deceptions, like the public school, because it claimed to be one thing when it was really another. It claimed to teach dance, but instead it taught immodesty, promiscuity. Satan was shrewd, dad said. By calling it dance, he convinced good Mormons to accept the sight of their daughters jumping about like whores in the lord's house. That fact offended dad more than anything else that such a lewd display had taken place in a church" (80-81). Despite Tara enjoying this activity her father forbid her from participating because of his own extremist way

of thinking which I believe had an impact on Westover's mental health.

For a time, Westover began to question her own sanity. She started to not believe her own memories and questioned all her actions. Her family told her that events she had remembered did not happen, and she was told this every time she tried to bring up something that Shawn had done to her. She was told this so much she questioned everyone of her memories and had to ask Drew if recent event had actually happened. They were gaslighting Tara to make her think differently than she did, which is the very embodiment of brainwashing. Shawn had much to do with Tara's mental state he would pretend to be a kind, loving brother one moment than the next he would snap and cause physical harm to Tara, making her unlikely to trust others. If any one was actively trying to brainwash Tara it was Shawn. It seemed as though he was trying to set up a relationship based around the idea of "disorganized attachment." Alexandra Stein describes disorganized attachment as when "the caregiver is not only the source of potential comfort but is also the source of threat"(18). I believe Shawn had done this unintentionally, he wasn't smart enough, the Westover's denying this threat is what led Tara to question her sanity and had a deep impact on Tara's life post Buck's Peak.

I do not believe that the Westover family is a cult though there is significant evidence to suggest this but I entirely believe that she was brainwashed by her family. The Westover's may not be a cult and they could have been trying to teach Tara "right" in their own way but still I believe that she owes them nothing and she should've cut off contact with them the moment she had the means to live on her own. Tara's story goes to show that everyone should be sure that the people in their lives are not harmful to them be that intentional or unintentional, and they should be prepared to cut them out of their lives, family or not. This is one example of the damage done to Westover "I began to differ,always, to the judgement of others. If drew remembered something differently than I did I would immediately concede the point. I began to rely on Drew to tell me the facts of our lives. I took pleasure in doubting my self about whether we'd seen a particular friend last week or the week before or whether our favorite creperie was next to the library or the museum. Questioning these trivial facts, and my ability to grasp them, allowed me to doubt whether anything I remembered had happened at all"(294). The westover family may not have tried to hurt Tara intentionally, but that does not change the fact that she was extremely devastated by their actions.

STICKS AND STONES

By Taryn Smith

“My scars tell a story. They are a reminder of times when life tried to break me, but failed. They are markings of where the structure of my character was welded.”

-Steve Maraboli

Educated is a memoir of Tara Westover's life. Tara grew up on a farm in Idaho that was hidden by Buck's Peak or referred to as the Indian princess in her book. Tara was never allowed to go to school or even have friends besides her family. Tara's only time she left the farm to socialize was at church on Sunday's where her father spread his religious views and tried to make them believe his false religious views he had made up. Throughout this story we come to find out some of her family members may have possible mental health diagnoses that are going untreated; they are causing a wedge to be driven between members of the family. Throughout the book we discover the family has no belief of needing the outside world or their offerings. They don't believe in doctors or seeking medical treatment; they don't believe in using any medications, only the herbs her mother makes up and uses as a cure all. Her family believes the government is out to get them and they spend their days prepping and preparing for the days of abomination. Throughout reading *Educated* and comparing to my own personal experiences, I have found that family influences our beliefs and lives. They make us question trust and relationships. When a family has a lot of conflicted thoughts and views, and engages in abusive acts, they cause further issues. Abuse is a big factor in a lot of relationships and families. Family conflict and abuse impacts a person's life, but also that person's outlook they have on life and relationships to come. Trust will be the biggest problem throughout life for the victim. They may even go as far as shutting people out and not wanting a bond due to fear of reliving their past events.

Most people or children are taught from an early age about manners or how words can hurt or impact someone. Being talked down to or being belittled about normal human curiosity and choices are a negative approach to communication and teaching. Many kids don't know it's wrong or that the words that are being stated are bad because their parents set the example and then forget they are teaching life lessons. Parents talk about their kids being stubborn or strong willed, but little do they know they instilled that in their children. In *Educated*, Westover's brother, Tyler, was set in his ways of going to school and getting an education. During this conversation Tyler received so much verbal and emotional abuse from his father and mother. His Father talked down to him with anger stating, "A man can't make a living out of books and scrap paper." He said, "You're going to be the head of a family. How can you support a wife and children with books?" (qtd. in Westover 42). Once Westover's mother noticed they weren't getting through to Tyler she stated, "You may as well take a broom and start sweeping off the mountain." (qtd. In Westover 42). The day Tyler chose to leave he had decided to leave the negative and take the positive; his family never gave him a proper goodbye or even a "I hope you fail." They let Tyler pack that car and go on about his choices; they had no care or concern in the world for him. Tara was the only one who reached out to Tyler in his final moments and stopped him from leaving. Tara stated, "Tyler stopped, then got out and hugged me- not the crouching hug that adults often give children but the other kind, both of us standing, him pulling me into him and bringing his face close to mine." (Westover 51). Tyler then went on telling Tara that he would miss her and then left for college. He not only in a way thanked Tara for the support, but

Tara was also heartbroken because her only safe spot was gone. The family didn't care because the abuser, Tara's Father, was not happy by being undermined and his wishes not being upheld. An abuser will put any influence they want from their victims and expect them to follow it or take their choice of consequences. Similarly, growing up, I sustained more emotional and verbal abuse and was beyond unaware until I was much older. I thought I was just a messed-up kid with no future or chance at being something. My siblings and I were talked down to and called names like stupid, dumb, retarded, because we didn't have little things completed to my Dad's time frame or wants. There was never any positive support or encouragement; he was set in his ways of pointing out every flaw you had and pointing out all the wrong decisions you made. If you took longer some nights than others to get homework done, you were retarded. The homework stalled you getting that house cleaned or the chores done, my father would then normally say "then why are you being so lazy? Or are you just stupid?" My father had no filter, and no matter how hard the words cut you were to always be feeling the sting; them words cutting you down you took them and never talked back to "The Man of the House." Talking down to a victim or children almost always results in further conflict or harm to the victim.

As you grow and learn about abuse and family conflicts you discover your own prison your living in. You then make the choice to change that; you start shutting people out and wanting more from people. Then when they don't meet your standards of wants, you're ok with leaving that relationship where it lies and move on. Westover's Father, after the horrible family accident coming home from Arizona, shut his family out; he was so scared of who he would lose and what possible awareness of their ways would become visible. He allowed Tara's Brother Tyler to take all the wrath of the accident and didn't once show support to his wife or help the kids assist in taking care of her. He just instantly tucked himself away after getting everyone home and out of the public eye. Communication plays a big part in any issue or problem in life as Westover's Father states, "If the lines are cut, we'll be the only people in the valley who can communicate." (qtd. In Westover 47). If you choose to shut certain people out, they won't talk to you no more; won't have to take the abuse and insults anymore. Growing up I was a very quiet and sheltered child. Thought it was normal and a parent's way to protect, but no it was a way for them to control you and break you down. My Dad had similar traits like Westover's father; he was very withdrawn from the world and wanted his ways to be kept secret. My dad was a raging alcoholic and was very abusive to all members of his family in all forms. He made sure to instill it not only in his wife but children also to put on a smile for the public eye, and not talk about our home life. My dad would always become abusive over the slightest trigger and then be like Westover's brother Tyler. He would apologize for his actions try to make the problem better or like it never happen. Then would go on to tell us a made up story about how if we tell anyone they will punish us more for lying. That rule of life was followed until the day my mom grew strong and moved him out after the choice of divorce. Abusers can fool those outside the home because, they usually abuse those inside the home.

Once you are placed in a position of family conflict and abuse, it's hard to come back from or fix the problems. Some believe it's an easy fix; remove the negative and take the positive and they believe problem solved. But that's not true because lots of people who sustain multiple life conflicts and abuse have lots of years on healing; if not seeking professional help to come back from the abuse sustained. Tara's mother was set in her ways of believing her herbal remedies could fix any problem in life, but Tara remained skeptical at times if that was always true. She swore even more about people's aura energy as a healer. Westover's mother stated, "So

we can draw from everyone's energy." (qtd. In Westover 59). But deep down yes, a positive aura can heal a lot of issues or personal problems you are battling. But lots of people eventually end with some form of diagnosis from the abuse they sustained; most cures or coping management comes from a prescription to help calm them from things that trigger their past. Westover's mother stated, "They'll swallow anything if it brings them hope, if it lets them believe they're getting better." (qtd. in Westover 59). With some people yes, this can be true some choose to use medicine to cover up the past; then choosing to work through it and help themselves move on. Then some choose to medicate to cut the curve off of the anxiety from the triggers and learn how to ground themselves; to keep moving forward and remind themselves they have grown from that place and they can do whatever they set their mind to. Growing up I felt like Tara more towards the end of her story. I wondered if something was wrong with me. Was I always a burden? Could Doctors fix me? My abuse left me with a diagnosis of anxiety and depression; leading me to needing a prescription to help cope with my past abuse. I needed to work on forming a more positive outlook on myself and my life to come. But it is not the bruises on the body that hurt. It is the wounds on the heart and the scars on the mind. Your past can be your guide into your future; you just must choose to change it.

At times when something or someone brings you pain you must remove whatever it is or the person of conflict. This is the part I spoke about in the previous paragraph about wanting to change and wanting to give yourself a more positive outlook. You shouldn't settle for less then you know you are worthy of; you shouldn't take someone's abuse just because you want to be a part of their lives. Just a thought, some abusers choose to abuse due to not wanting a person in their lives or presence. They even do it because of uncontrollable circumstances of not knowing they have a diagnosis that is yet to be diagnosed. Shawn was angered by Sadie's choice to be friends with Charles and not follow his demanding wishes. Shawn stated, "I have the perfect punishment," he said. "I simply won't see her. "All I have to do is not see her, and she will suffer." (qtd. in Westover 109). Shawn in that moment chose that since someone was not being his obedient pet, suffering or pain was the only option; the option that was shown to them obviously during time of growing up and still is. When my mom chose to divorce my dad and end the abuse and family conflict; he chose to cut all ties to his children because he no longer had control. He had no minds to corrupt or threats or abusive, slandered names to give out because now his secret was exposed. He refused all visitation and wanting no rights due to failure to be in control. My mom was bold to the court systems about him needing to seek help. He refused all attempts of medical treatment and counseling. Courts then granted him supervised visits until completed; he then chose that day to sign away his rights and never look back. Abusers don't like someone else controlling the show or not following their wishes; when that happens, it lights a rage in them to be violent. My father and Shawn relate in many aspects; if they both never had control, they would become abusive if not violent to the person trying to undermine them. There was no other right way to a situation unless it was their way and living a life with that mind set can hurt a person's future and ways of becoming self-confident, enough, and even independent.

Abusers over time will try to apologize and try to make you believe they have changed or swear to be getting help for their problems. That's all a lie, they use those same words to all their victims. They want to find any way back into your life and keep finding ways to keep the past cycle going. They already know all your strength and weakness; they know how to keep you the victim and call you a liar upon trying to expose them. When Tara came to her father about

Shawn's abuse, she heard everything but support or worry. Her father demanded proof and did everything to protect Shawn of Tara's "accusations". As time goes on the family keeps talking to Tara and trying to cover up Shawn's actions with excuses; framing it all to come back to her taking things out of context and being hysterical. Tara's mother even told her she was a threat to Shawn and his family by the way she acted. Westover's mother stated, "Your anger that night," (qtd. in Westover 292) referring to night Tara called out her brother about being abusive to her father. Then her mother went on to state, "was twice as dangerous as Shawn has ever been." (qtd. in Westover 292). She then proceeded on telling Tara that Shawn had never done anything to her and never threatened anyone that night with a knife, and then even longer over time never recalled the knife. She then after it all stated, "Your reality is so warped. It's like talking to someone who wasn't even there." Tara's family obviously had picked their side and left Tara with many mixed emotions. Abusers go as far as getting violent with the people they are trying to persuade and make them take their side. My Dad had tried long after my mom and his separation to come back and make amend. He tried to pull out all the common stops; he said, "I have changed, I swear to sobriety, I want to make up for all my wrong doings in the past." Big Mistake! Most abusers never change, they are like a pest and do anything to find a way in. Being a person who believes everyone deserves a second chance; I got burnt, he tried to go even farther and hurt me. He tried to kidnap my first child from the babysitter; he had spent all day watching me and scoping out his plan. Once he knew I was a work and was harder to get away he tried to break into the daycare and take her. When he was pulled in for questioning after his arrest and asked why he did it, only answer he gave was "She chose to not give me a chance to raise her right; so I was going to raise her daughter the way she should have been.". All that proved was he needed someone to control and undermine. Someone he could abuse and keep control over, just like Westover's brother Shawn did to her family.

Many People look back over the years and how their life played out and feel they should have been more observant of the signs. They even wonder why they sat there and even took the abuse. Many people like Tara and I don't know it's wrong or there are other ways to be treated until you are free of the abuse and get exposed to a positive lifestyle. But there will always be someone that will live in the past and drag you down over your life choices; maybe even call you crazy for putting up with it. But don't be so hard on yourself because your only human. Tara after being blamed out as a liar had a mental breakdown and had to step back and reevaluate her life. Her Family pretty much looked down upon her and called her a hysterical person and was more of the issue and not her brother. Westover stated, "I lived the life of a lunatic." (Westover 294). She questioned her journals, all the black and white proof; she questioned her brother's ex-girlfriends only trying to seek out a witness. She over time gets the grounding she needed when a gentleman hollered out her last name and questioned her relation to Shawn. He went on to state, "Well, the last time I saw your brother, he had both hands wrapped around my cousin's neck, and he was smashing her head into a brick wall. He would have killed her, if it weren't for my grandfather." (qtd. in Westover 295). Westover that day was given the clarity she needed, she wasn't crazy, and wasn't the problem all along. I Felt a lot like Tara in the end, but instead of the break down I had questions. Why do I have to give proof of abuse? Look at his criminal record. Why do my memories of the abuse have to be a lie? Oh, I know why, because truth wasn't meant to be set free. Not only that, who in this world gets to choose did I or did I not get abused? No one else obviously witnessed it, sat around and watch this happen to me directly. So why do they get to determine if my abuse was severe enough? Or looked at as a liar or accused of

just trying to frame someone I hate. Well like I said earlier, people do anything they can to keep the abuser happy and not trigger them. The abuser will do anything in their power to make the victim the world's biggest liar.

No matter what family you come from you will always have conflicts; depending on the severity is how you should act on it. It is the same in an abused household or even just a person of abuse; how you choose to change it or make a difference, means a lot towards the next step in your life. Like Tara Westover in *Educated* and I both, we had to get away from that abusive environment and see a positive outlook to know we were in a bad place. We then tried to seek help or find someone to talk to; Tara had no one and had to stay away at college to be safe. I on the other hand, well my mom had to act and file for a divorce and push him away. But the biggest thing Tara and I both took away from having this lifestyle is that we lived through it and got out. We didn't believe all the negative remarks and let the abuse define us. We both chose to make something of our future and let our pasts go and stay in the past. We shut those doors and look only forward to a better future. Don't let your past define you and don't let it stop you from reaching your goals.

The Choices We Make

By Brittnae Tarrence

“In every single thing you do, you are choosing a direction. Your life is a product of choices.”

-Dr. Kathleen Hall

In the book, *The Other Wes Moore One Name, Two Fates*, by Wes Moore, two men with the same name grow up in similar neighborhoods and live very different lives. They both grow up without fathers, and their mothers raised them differently. The absence of their parents impacted the two Wes' lives in different ways. Many people grow up without family influences and lead good lives; others let the absence of their parents change their lives in a negative way. Both Weses could have gone down the same path, but they each chose different paths. Wes one changed his bad ways and became a paratrooper in the army. Wes two continued down the wrong path, which led him to life imprisonment for robbing a jewelry store and killing an off-duty police officer. The choices they made were impacted by the absence of their parents and peer pressure.

Wes one's father died from Epiglottitis when he was three years old. Epiglottitis is a rare disease that causes the windpipe to be inflamed, making it hard to breathe. Wes one was very close to his father and looked up to him as being his role model. Wes was his dad's "Main Man" (11) and his dad was his protector. The death of his father led him to remember certain words that his father said to him as a child. Wes one's father sat down on the bed and placed Wes one on his lap and had a deep conversation with his son. Wes one's father said, "You just can't hit people and particularly women. You must defend them, not fight them. Do you understand?" (11) Wes one's father said this to him after Wes had punched his sister Nikki in the face. At the time, Wes one was not sure what his father meant but came to realize that his mother had been abused before by a man. This event caused Wes to never hit a woman because the words his father told him stuck in his head. He chose to listen to the words his father told him as a child. At one point in my life I was like both Weses, but I chose the right path like Wes one did.

Wes two's father was a suffering drug addict and chose not to be in his son's life. He had only ever tried to be a part of Wes's life one time and that was when he was drunk banging on Wes's mom's front door begging to see his son. After that incident, he never tried to see his son again. Wes had only met his father twice and each time his father had no clue who he was. One time his dad was lying on his grandma's couch drunk. Wes's mom Mary said, "Meet your father." Wes two's dad responded by saying, "Who's this?" (25). Wes two did not have either parent in his life because his dad chose not to be present and Wes two's mom was working all the time.

Wes two might have chosen not to be present in his own children's life because his father was not present in his own life. The lack of parenting resulted in Wes two blaming his girlfriend's pregnancy on her instead of realizing it takes two people to make a baby. Wes said, "How could have Alicia let herself get pregnant" (99). Like Alicia, I got pregnant at a young age. I chose to change my actions and take care of my child. Wes two's actions resulted in him being absent in his children's life.

I can relate back to Wes one because my father committed suicide when I was five years old. This impacted my life in a negative way, but only because I chose to let the death of my dad control my life. My dad had bipolar disorder and schizophrenia; he eventually lost his battle to the disease and took his own life. I remember the morning right before he had decided to take

his own life that afternoon. I went on with my usual morning routine and got dressed for school. I then headed to the bus stop, but before leaving the house I said to my dad, "Can I have a hug and kiss before I leave?" He responded, "Sorry not today sweetie. I am not feeling well." As his daughter I knew this was weird because my dad always gave me a hug before I went to school. I went on with my day and at about 12 PM my school received the devastating news that my dad had shot himself and did not survive. I let the death of my father control my life instead of remembering the good times my father and I shared. I shut people out and lost many connections with my friends. I was very upset about the whole situation and became depressed as child. The death of my father resulted in these actions, but I chose to let my depression control me. Like Wes one, we both endured the loss of a loved one and we coped with the loss differently.

Peers can impact our decision to make choices, but we have the ultimate choice to do right. Wes one chose to not do well in school. He would choose what days to attend class and what days not to attend class. Wes' English teacher told him, "It doesn't matter to me if you show up because my class runs better without you being here" (77). Wes one then chose to stop attending school completely and started hanging out with the wrong group of friends. One day Wes was hanging with his friend Shea in front of the Cue Lounge, which is a bar and billiards club. Shea asked Wes, "You wanna tag?" (80) Wes knew he could not say no because Shea was a well-respected young hustler in their neighborhood. He chose to write his name on a wall with spray paint and got busted by the cops. At that moment Wes realized he was going to get arrested and his mom would find out. The thoughts of disappointing his mother ran through his head and at this moment he realized that the only person that really cared about him was not his friends, but his mother. Wes's bad actions and the thoughts of disappointing his mom made him to decide to do better with his life instead of continuing down the wrong path. He decided that day that he would never be caught in a situation like that again.

Wes two stayed on the wrong path and let his environment determine the choices he made. One day Wes two and his friend Red got on the "cheese bus" in Dundee Village and was headed to their high school in West Baltimore. As they both got on the bus, they noticed two girls that they had never seen before. Wes whispered to Red, "You see them?" Red responded, "Yeah, man, I want to holler at the skinny one" (3). Red without hesitation made the ultimate choice to go over and talk with the girls. Wes then followed his friend Red and took part in talking with the girls. Red did not hit things off with the girl he chose, but Wes ended up dating Alicia the girl he had chosen to talk with. The event of Wes and his friend meeting the two girls on the bus led to Wes getting Alicia pregnant.

I can relate to Wes two because I had a child at a young age. I was thirteen when I got pregnant and fourteen when I had my child. My mom was present in my life but was not always around and did not care about the decisions I made. I started hanging with an older guy and ended up getting sexually involved which led to me getting pregnant. The father chose not to be in my daughter's life. I chose to be a part of my child's life and take responsibility for my actions unlike Wes two. I did not want my child to end up without her parents like me. Wes two chose the other route and let the absence of his parents cause him to be absent in his children's life.

The absence of parents in their lives and peer pressure had a big toll on the decisions the boys chose to make. Ultimately, the choice was in their own hands and was up for them to decide. Wes one chose to straighten his life up and chose the right path. Wes two stayed on the wrong path which lead his life to go downhill. The choices both Wes' made determined how their

life evolved. The choices made in life affect our lives. The choices I made in my life have determined the outcome of my life. I am now a freshman in college and my child is preschool. The choice to improve my life led to me being successful in my current life status. Your life is a product of choices and you choose what choice to make. If people, follow the people who make bad choices their life could end up bad. Then if they choose to not follow these bad choices their life could end up good.

EDUCATION and *Literacy*



Education Means Change

By Joseph Bui

In the memoir called *Educated*, Tara Westover's family is different from what people in today's society consider normal. Westover and her siblings didn't go to public school, they were taught at home by their mother. Westover's father thought that public schools made plans with the government to lure children away from God. Westover's father had very strong beliefs towards education and hospitals. The Westover family never went to a hospital no matter how bad the injury. They stayed at home and let their mother take care of it using her herbs that could cure any injury. Westover's father believes that the government is run by the illuminati and that their only objective is to get people to turn away from God. Westover's father is a huge believer in God. He believes that God determines the way the world works, that God will take care of all the bad and events happen because God wanted it to happen. The Westover family lives in Idaho in a place away from the government called Buck's Peak. Her father works at a junkyard with his children, including Westover, and the mother working as a midwife. At the beginning, Westover and her family are close, but by the end, she cuts ties with her family. The reason for the division between Westover's family and Westover was education, because she went to college and that gave her a new outlook on life that is different from her family.

Westover's father claims that public schools were made by the government to lure children away from God by teaching them in a way that isn't the way of God. In chapter one, Westover's grandma and father were arguing that Westover and her siblings should go to school but her father refuses because he believes that public schools will make his children turn away from God saying to Westover's Grandma, "'I may as well surrender my kids to the devil himself,' he said, 'as send them down to the road to that school'" (5). This argument between her father and grandma matters because it shows how much her father hated public schools. She had to believe in her father that public schools were evil because she was still a child and didn't know what they actually were or what they actually did. She believed in her father's beliefs until she started going to college.

Westover's brother demonstrates that going to college, even though their father was against his children or any family member going to public school, was better than staying at home and working for their father. Westover's father really despises public education; however, Westover's brother, Tyler, went to college and loved it. In chapter thirteen, Tyler recommended Westover to go to college too and claiming that there's a world out there and working for their father was not the way she should live her life. "'There is a world out there, Tara,' he said. 'And it will look a lot different once Dad is no longer whispering his view of it in your ear'" (120). She thought about going but was indecisive about it at first because their father had the belief that a woman's job is to stay home, doing what a housewife would do and the huge belief that public schools are evil. Westover ignored all of her father's beliefs and applied to be a student at BYU (Westover applied to BYU since the college took homeschoolers). Westover had to take the ACT and reach a specific score in order to apply. She applied to take it and studied as hard as she could, getting Tyler to help her and got the minimum required score at the end. Getting that score as shown Westover her hard work and the thought that maybe God wanted her to go to college. "Sometimes I was sure God wanted me to go to college, because He'd given me that twenty-eight..But whatever the outcome, I knew I would leave, even if it wasn't to school" (148-149). Westover got the ACT she needs and then applied for BYU and accepted. Westover

applying and getting accepted at BYU matters because it was the start of Westover's new life that would start the division between her and her family. She went against her father's beliefs about public schools and headed off to college alone having no idea of what will happen to her and wondering if it was a smart choice.

Westover claims that her father's beliefs in hospitals, the government, and education still stuck with her father's beliefs and that she still believed them when she started college but those beliefs would soon change after Westover experienced them each individually. The beliefs she still believed in were that hospitals are filled with liars that prescribe poison instead of medicine, the government being run by the illuminati, and education luring children away from God. All three things were what her father was against and despised. In chapter twenty-three, Westover was shown that the government was not run by the illuminati and that the government was made to help people. Westover was running low on cash for college and had a tooth that she had to go get fixed because she was in a lot of pain and keeping it there would be very dangerous. She was advised by the bishop from the school's church to apply for government grants. She refused at first saying that she didn't believe in them but the bishop persuades her to apply for them because that's what the government was made for. It was made to help people. She finally decided later to apply for it, giving the government her parent's tax returns and then got money for college, her tooth, and other uses. "I'd used to believe the money would be used to control me, but what it did was enable me to keep my word to myself: for the first time, when I said I would never again work for my father, I believe it" (206). Westover applying for government grants matters because it showed more division between Westover and her family. Westover went against her father's beliefs that public schools are evil by going to one and now she went against another, which was to ask the government for help. Her father doesn't like the government being afraid that they will put their family in danger but after Westover applied for government grants, having received more than enough money than she needed, she wondered what her father believed was true and had the thought that what the bishop said about the government was made to help people was true.

Westover also acknowledges that hospitals don't put poison in the medicine like her father said they do and that hospitals don't lie saying that the medication they give will help. In chapter twenty-four, Westover had an aching pain in her throat that bothered her for days but she refused to go to the doctor at first saying that her mother will cure it with her herbs but then later she decided to go to the hospital because she was so much in pain and was also curious about what her father said about hospitals were true. She went to the hospital near her and took the pills they prescribed to her, being scared that it might kill her in a very gruesome way but took it because of curiosity and the amount of pain she was in. "I swallowed the pills. Perhaps it was desperation because I felt so poorly, but I think the reason was more mundane: curiosity" (214). Nothing happened after taking it and that showed her the hospital wasn't lying about medication helping people and that there is no poison inside the medicine they prescribe. Westover going to the hospital matters because it divides her from her family even more going against a third thing her father is against and that is going to the hospital. Going to the hospital matters because Westover doubt her father even more. Hospitals aren't what her father it said it was out to be, just like the government being evil. She began to think differently from the rest of her family starting to know that those evil things, the government, hospitals, and public schools were are false things that her father said and believed, having experienced this for herself and saw the true reasoning behind those three things and why her father acted the way he did.

Westover reports that her father had bipolar disorder after learning about the symptoms in her psychology class and doing research on it because the symptoms sounded a lot like her father (207). Her father having bipolar disorder was why he believed in the things he believed. Westover having realize and seeing that her father's view on things were inaccurate, she began to become more distant and eventually becoming divided from her family because of her father not believing her when she told him that Shawn, another one of her brother, had been very abusive towards her and Westover's father claiming that Shawn would never do such a thing and she had to prove it to him, otherwise she had to apologize to Shawn. Westover knew that her father was wrong for not believing her and refused to cooperate with her father and eventually cut ties with her and her father along with the rest of the family (the rest of the family didn't believe in Westover either). "That is how I told my parents I was cutting off contact with them. Between insults and fits of temper, I said I needed a year to heal myself; then perhaps I could return to their mad world to try to make sense of it. My mother begged me to find another way. My father said nothing" (313). Westover cutting ties with her family and refusing to apologize matters because it sets a new beginning for Westover. She has now no family members that she could go to but Tyler. Tyler didn't believe Westover one hundred percent either about Shawn but he didn't believe in their father one hundred percent either. Being educated, going to college mattered in this because if she didn't go to college and didn't learn about all the things she has learned and experienced in and during college, then she wouldn't have the courage or even the thought of going against her father with something as big as having their family relationship on the line, which would lead to no more relationship between them after the event.

In the article "The Confessions -- and Confusions -- of a First-Generation Scholar", Herb Childress, the author and the main character, is a first-generation scholar that demonstrates that going to college can change her relationship with her family and friends because of an environment a person lives in. Similar to Westover, the people around him, his family, friends, neighbors, didn't go to college either and thing that they have in common is that Childress's father wanted Childress to inherit his business and ended up not like Westover's father wanting Westover to stay home and work him. They both go to college without knowing what to expect and ended up being successful. As time went on and both continuing going to college, they became more separated with their family. They both became the irregular in each of their families. "As I went on through my graduate education, I became a class traitor: a source of pride, confusion, envy and intimidation among family and neighbors who once had been my natural allies" (par. 10). Childress got labeled as a class traitor between his friends and family because he went to college and didn't do what was expected of him, which is to inherit his father's business. Westover had a very similar experience between her and her family. In chapter thirty- seven, Westover found out that her mother was telling people that she thinks that her daughter, Westover, is being controlled by the devil because she now thought differently from her family. "I had known, even before reading the message, that my mother shared my father's dark vision, that she believed the devil had a hold me, that I was dangerous" (Westover 309). Both Childress and Westover were close to their family at first but when they started going to college, they became own person that didn't agree how their family thought and found a new life they love now.

Westover claims that all this happen to her not because God decided it to happen, it was because it was a step towards being educated. She realized that hospitals, education, and the government was not what her father said and that believing in what her father believes and

thinking what her father thinks is wrong, now knowing that it's not her way of viewing things but her father's. Going to college has made her meet people and meeting those people helped give her a new perspective on life, different from her father's, and making a perspective for herself. That perspective would turn out to be a new person she became after being separated from her family from time to time and eventually cutting ties with them. "You could call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education" (329). She stood up against her dad and his beliefs because she knew she was in the right and that agreeing with him and seeing the same way as him would be wrong and that wouldn't be her, Tara Westover, but her father's follower. She took what she learned and experienced in college and the times and events she spent with her professors and friends that she made to create a personality for herself and a new and better life for her.

The Key to Success

By Alyssa Fanning

As a child I always wondered why we were required to read books in school. That was until I had a new experience with the book *Ida B.* The book gave me the thought that maybe there was something more to our teachers making us read, other than just to keep us busy. In the story "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," Richard Rodriguez, an American writer, claims that he found joy and company in spending time reading books. He supports this claim by first describing how familiar he was with books growing up. Then, he goes on to describe what he learned from reading books, and how they helped him. Towards the end of the story, Rodriguez explains how books have shaped him into the person he is now. He describes how spending all that time reading, helped him become successful in life. I can also say that reading has helped me become closer to the success that I want for myself in life. Reading books throughout my life have helped me tremendously through an education standpoint, like Rodriguez. As we both grew up not surrounded by books, we learned to enjoy reading and writing on our own, which has allowed us to be successful today.

At the beginning of Richard Rodriguez's story, he explains that he grew up noticing his parents did not spend much time reading out of enjoyment. Rodriguez tells us, "For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible. Never did I see either of them read an entire book. Nor did I see them read for pleasure" (203). I can relate to Rodriguez's experience of his parents not reading for pleasure. Growing up, I never noticed my parents reading books during any free time they had. Seeing that my parents did not further their education could be a reason as to why they did not enjoy reading and writing as much, and are not as literate as they could have been. Neither one of my parents went to college, and I think this is something that motivated me to want to go to college and get a degree. I believe it is important to read books to expand your knowledge and become successful. Noticing that they did not ever read a lot as I was growing up, encouraged me to do different than them. Although books were something I believed to be crucial to my success, I did not always enjoy reading. Rodriguez, however, explains that reading books was something he found comfort in. Reading was enjoyable for him. Rodriguez states, "In spite of earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books" (204). For me, I did not read for pleasure or joy. I read books because I knew it would help me in my future. I never found interest in reading, but I knew it was important to do so. As a child, I loved reading books. I would spend all of my free time at the library, reading as many books as I could, but as I got older I lost interest in reading. As a child in school, I was always given books to read that were under my reading level, causing me to get bored of the books and not enjoy my time spent reading. I never got to pick my own book in elementary school, because we were forced to read a certain book and then we were told to make book reports over that book that we were given. As I got older, I found books that fit my reading level, making them more enjoyable for me. One book in particular was *The Giver*. *The Giver* was a book that I found interest in, that was still challenging me with its word use. When it came to writing, however, I always had an interest in being able to express my thoughts. I realized that writing was a way to help me become more interested in books again, and helped me become a better reader as well. A lot of the times, writing can help you to express yourself, and I realized that is how authors express what they have in their head. By writing books. One day, I decided to pick up a book to see if I could figure

out what the author's purpose was for the writing the book. After that, I became more intrigued and started reading a lot more.

Another similarity that I have to Rodriguez, is the influence reading and books made on me. Without reading, I wouldn't be where I am today. I am in college, studying to become an educator. As Rodriguez says, "Didn't I realize that reading would open up whole new worlds? A book could open doors for me. It could introduce me to people and show me places I never knew existed" (204). Whether Rodriguez is being literal or not, he describes that as he read books, he realizes that the books are opening new doors for him. Teaching him things he never knew about. Likewise, books did the same thing for me. In third grade, I was given the book *Ida B.* This book showed me a whole new side to reading. I learned about the character of the book, and it taught me a lesson. I learned to never take what you had for granted. Also, with the help of reading, I realized the importance of continuing my education. I knew that I needed to go to college to be successful as a teacher in the future. If I want to make the difference in children's lives that I have always wanted to do, it is important for me to be successful in my college career. I know that I plan to continue to read, even after college because I know that I will be able to expand my knowledge even more. As a teacher, it is important to learn as much as you can, because you are teaching children things that they need to know.

Overall, Rodriguez and I had some differences in life growing up, but we also had many similarities. The experiences we had in life with books and reading, helped us with our success as we got older. Taking the time to read books can help you immensely with your academic success. Like Rodriguez had mentioned before, reading books can open new doors. Whether that is intended towards his education, or in life, there are still many reasons why it is important to take an hour or so out of the day to pick up a book and start reading. As a child, seeing that my parents did not take the time to read and write encouraged me to do different, but I soon changed to the thought that maybe books were not all that enjoyable to read. Overall, I came to the conclusion that to be a teacher and be successful in life, it is important for me to take time to sit and read in my everyday life. I hope that with the help of these books that I have spent time reading my whole life, I will be able to influence and motivate the children I will be teaching to want to read and write more in their lives. As a teacher, I would want to give my students a different experience than I had. I would want my students to pick out their own books and explore, as to where I was given a book and forced to read it. I would want my students to be able to find how a book that they pick has opened new doors for them.

First Generation Students

By Rowan Graham

Being a first-generation student means that you're taking a risk, stepping outside of your comfort zone, and doing something you have never seen anyone in your family do before. Tara Westover, author of *Educated* and Herb Childress, author of "An Insider's View of the Life of a First Generation Scholar" are first-generation students that come from different lives. Westover was not educated at all. She comes from a home where she did not attend any type of school until she became a college student. She lived in a dysfunctional home, her father had mental problems, her mother never spoke up, her brother, Shawn, was physically abusive to her and her siblings, and Tyler was always there for her, inspiring her to go to college. Her family disowned her after she went to college. Childress has only one parent with a high school diploma. His mother always wanted him to attend college. Nobody around him went to college. He was educated. at least had higher education than Westover because he has a real high school diploma. Westover's struggles are in part because she is a first-generation student, which is an issue Childress also deals with. When you're a first-generation student your hopes and dreams can be shattered. You have to understand that first-generation college students truly do have it rough at school and their lives at home are something different after they do attend college.

Westover and Childress both were confused college students. Westover was discouraged because she didn't know what her classmates knew. In her memoir she wrote, "I told her I shouldn't have came to Cambridge. I didn't understand anything" (257). Childress's community didn't support the education system so the people in his community went to school then they were not welcomed at home. He didn't know what to do. Childress said in his essay that he "became a class traitor: a source of pride, confusion" (2). Westover and Childress wanted to get an education but were confused because nobody else around them had even stepped into a University. Nobody to help them on their journey to college. They had to do it on their own. It was important to make sure they were pushing themselves to get through college because it's something they wanted, it was their hopes and dreams they had to follow.

Being lucky to go to school and meet people who are willing to help you because they care is everything. Westover said, "I reasoned with myself that my passing the ACT was so unlikely, it would take an act of God. And if God acted, then surely my going to school was His will" (134). She passes that ACT with luck. Childress said, "My fellow students pushed me, and I pushed them, and we did things we didn't imagine ourselves capable of" (2). It's important to help each other because they can share challenges and concerns and help you overcome them. First generation student's classmates have strategies that can benefit them in the long run. So it is ok to help others and receive help as well.

Hidden because they don't feel safe. Being safe is what Westover and Childress wanted to be. Westover hides her past from her friends. She takes up for her family and questions herself about them so they don't seem so bad. As she grows, she learns that many of these decisions were not for her benefit and actually caused damage to her. Some of these decisions ended in physical harm, but many ended with mental damage. Westover learns that she gave this power to her family by allowing them to make those decisions for her without standing up for herself. Westover says, "It's strange how you give the people you love so much power over you" (199). Westover gave her family so much power over her because their opinions were so easily accepted, he wanted to do no wrong in their eyes. Childress tried not to be noticed. She holds

back saying too much or his family might take offense to anything he says. They might think he's better than them because he is the first to attend a University. Childress must "master the camouflage that keeps us hidden and safe" (4). As a first-generation student, you are looked up to higher standards. You must not say the wrong words or you'll be judged straight off the back.

College can change a first-generation student life in ways you can not imagine, either for the good or bad. First-generation students will expense and learn new materials first hand. Childress and Westover were first-generation students. They knew first hand how college can change them. For them both, it turned out good in the end. College has cost them a lot, not only the money they had to pay along the way but the loved ones they had before. Westover wouldn't have lived her life as she chose to, she would not have been able to write the book *Educated*, she wouldn't have gotten so many opportunities as she had gotten, she would not have gotten an education, she would still not know who Adolf Hitler was or how to write an essay. She would still be a lost girl depending on her dad to tell her what to believe and what to do and not do, her life had changed because of college. Westover says "Everything I had worked for, all my years of study, had been to purchase for myself this one privilege: to see and experience more truths than those given to me by my father, and to use those truths to construct my own mind. I had come to believe that the ability to evaluate many ideas, many histories, many points of view, was at the heart of what it means to self-create. If I yielded now, I would lose more than an argument. I would lose custody of my own mind. This was the price I was being asked to pay, I understood that now. What my father wanted to cast from me wasn't a demon: it was me" (304). Westover had to work hard to see her full potential. Her father gave her an ultimatum, she had to either let her father take her "demons" away or live her life as she pleases and be happy. Her dreams cost her a lot but she doesn't regret it. Childress says "We recognize more fully than most that college can change your life" (4). First generation students recognize first hand that college can change them. They don't get the chance to see it through their family's eyes because they are the first generation, so they must work ten times harder than any other college student. Westover and Childress changed for the better. These two first-generation students overcame a lot to get their degrees and in the end it was all worth.

Being a first-generation student is hard. Westover and Childress were first-generation students. First-generation college students trying to navigate institutions that were not created for them. Being first-generation sucks because you don't know any of the answers, Being first-generation sucks because you are forced to figure out the system on your own, Being first-generation sucks because your parents can't help you because they don't know either, Being first-generation sucks because you cannot fail, It is important that I wrote this because I, myself am a first-generation student, who comes from nothing. I know how hard it is to try to get an education on your own. I also know it will all pay off in the end. As a first-generation college student, you must ask for help, get all the help you can, reach out to teachers, counselors, just someone who can mentor you along your journey. No matter how you feel get up, get dressed, and show up. As Barack Obama once said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."

Ink Splattered Across A Blank Page

By Jasmine Kennedy

I remember sitting in my Algebra class for fifty minutes, listening as the teacher droned on and on. Math seemed less important to me and I waited for the clock to reach '8:50.' I hated it; wanting nothing more than to get out of math, yearning to leave and escape to American Government with Mr. Tillman. I don't always get what I want, and today was no different. I never ended up going to American Government that day. The thing that got me out of class was a voice calling me over the intercom, wrapping around my body and slowly bringing me deeper into the depths of hell. My mother pulled me out of school. She forcefully grabbed my arm, leaving behind a red mark. My prison cell was waiting and I was going to be trapped behind those bars. I didn't know how long but I counted every day. The closer I got towards the exit, the more fear I felt as I didn't realize what was happening. I realized as she ushered me into the car, whispering words that held no truths. I could always pick up on her lies and today was no different. She was telling me I'd be back at school tomorrow. The way she said it left me feeling scared. I hated being able to tell that she was lying. I hated knowing that she could easily lie to me. The fact that she was lying caused a wildfire to wreak havoc in my body. I was both angry and afraid. I remember the fear of losing my education, the anger spilling out as I tried to hide my fear behind this anger. My mother didn't want me going to school. That is what she told me. I knew better, it must have been my father voicing his wishes and her just going along with them. My mother was furious when she found out I was accepted into college. I would not conform to them, I would get an education. My father's anger was radiating off of my mother as the yelling and screaming got worse. This moment left an impact on me. This is the moment everything seemed like it was falling apart. My education, that I had worked so hard for, was slipping out of my fingers. I was losing my education. I realized when I began college that there were other people feeling this way. That's when I began to read the memoir *Educated* and realized I wasn't alone in my search for education. I was just on a different path. In the memoir *Educated* by Tara Westover, she tells the story of her escape from the mountain, that she grew up on, and her burning desire for an education. She wasn't always invested in her education, she became this way after seeing her brother Tyler go off to college. Westover eventually had the same dream, despite what the rest of her family wanted. Westover and I share a similar background towards education. We both faced many struggles and fought to become educated. Westover desired to work hard for her education and to achieve her goals, she made that dream a reality. I desire to grow as a person and to work harder to reach my goals. To become educated, just like Westover did.

When I was younger, my mother wouldn't read to me, to the point she wouldn't be caught dead with a book. I, on the other hand, love books. I don't know where my love for reading began and I don't know when the written words captured my heart. All I know is that I've been falling down this concavity, into the shelves containing book after book, ever since I was younger. I never saw either one of my parents pick up a book and yet my passion for books continued growing. My passion for learning wrapped around my body, as if hugging me. The books were whispering in my ear, telling me to keep reading and learning despite what my parents thought. My parents never wanted me to go to college and they made it very clear that they never wanted me to get an education, just like Westover. Westover's father never wanted her to go to college. "College is extra school for people too dumb to learn the first time around (P.

41)." My father thinks that college is pointless and people who go to college aren't smart enough for what the "real world" has to offer. I tried to explain my views to him but he would never listen. In that way, my father is a lot like Westover's father. My father believed college wasn't good as well.

I've always wanted to go to college. I don't know if it was because of my love for learning or if the thought of escaping my home life pushed this dream to work its way into my mind and become a reality. But I developed a yearning to listen to my teacher's voice as it echoed throughout the classroom, their words holding a great importance to me. I may not be like most people, however, my view on education has impacted me in a way that no one can change. College has impacted me in many ways and I am glad I could make this dream a reality. Westover didn't always want to go to college, in that way we differ. She only wanted to go after seeing her brother leave behind their isolated home. When she developed that burning desire for education, she fought as hard as she could to keep her education. That is how we are similar. We both fought for our education and to go to college. She says in her memoir that she might lose her PHD despite fighting for it and choosing her education over her family. "By December I was so far behind in my work that, pausing one night to begin a new episode of *Breaking Bad*, I realized that I might fail my PhD. I laughed maniacally for ten minutes at this irony: that having sacrificed my family to Education, I might lose that, also" (306). Westover believed that education was more important than family. Especially when family is the one thing standing between you and your education. College is something I have strived for since I was twelve years old. My family constantly gets in the way of my education. My father believes that getting an education is a waste of time and will not help you in the "real world," and just like Westover I have put education over my family's wishes.

My Parents never wanted me to get an education. It almost seemed like the thought disgusted them. I remember the day I had applied, I didn't tell my parents. It might've been because I was afraid what they would say or because I never expected to be accepted into college. The day I got my acceptance letter, I began to cry. I was so surprised and it felt like somebody had actually wanted me. It felt like somebody thought I was smart enough and belonged in college. When I told my parents, they were less joyful and were just as equally surprised. I don't think they expected me to try to expand on my education. I don't think they knew how I felt in a classroom or how I felt while I was writing. My parents tried to talk me out of my decision, they even threatened to kick me out of the house. They were furious with me and it was beyond noticeable. It felt as if I had lost their support the moment I decided to go to college and no matter how hard I tried, I would never get it back. Westover had to make a choice. She could either choose her family and keep their support or she could choose her education and lose them. She could either keep her reality or trade it for theirs. She couldn't have both. "I could have my mother's love, but there were terms, the same terms they had offered me three years before: that I trade my reality for theirs, that I take my own understanding and bury it, leave it to rot in the earth" (322). Westover had to choose education over her parents love, while I had to choose it over my parents' support. She had fought for and chose her reality despite how hard it is to go against your family. If she chooses education than she loses them. If I chose education, I would lose my parents' support. We both knew what we were doing and made the best choice possible for our realities.

Without my parents' support, I was forced to learn and become educated on my own. My parents didn't read, write, or have a wide variety of words swimming around in their mind. You

could say the word, "cretinous" and they wouldn't even know what that meant. I don't think I have seen them even pick up a dictionary. I, on the other hand, have read the dictionary countless times. I had always wanted to learn an extensive vocabulary and have always wanted to improve my education through reading. Not having my parents support drove me to become independent in my education. I pushed myself through highschool and taught myself everything I needed to know so I could pass my classes. Despite being self-taught, I was put into multiple honors English classes and earned the A+ scholarship. Westover had to teach herself everything, just like me. "Learning in our family was entirely self-directed: you could learn anything you could teach yourself..." (46). Her parents didn't support her getting an education. So she had to independently get herself through college. When she took the ACT, she had no support and had to study on her own just to get into college. It's a lot harder to learn on your own, with barely any support from anyone. It's different.

My education is like ink splattered across a blank page. My education is a story that has a beginning but no end, not yet at least. I read so many books, my passion for reading is still growing to great lengths. My love for writing began shortly after and then I began to realize what being educated meant. My confidence was lacking though and I could only get my words out on paper. Now my walls are slowly crumbling as my voice fills the open air. I am finally being heard. Because I became educated, my voice was finally able to be heard. I fought for so long for somebody to hear me and tell me that they're listening. I eventually got into college through many hardships and challenges. College was different, a good different. There are many people who tell me that they hear me, that they are listening. Although, my story isn't like a normal story about somebody going off to school and trying to keep their grades up. My story is filled with a burning desire for a little taste of education and many twists and turns. My fight is what kept me going. Despite my parents insisting that college was nonsense and never listening to me, I continued to learn and grow as a person. I continued to pursue my dreams and made my way into college, despite what my family said. I have learned that anything is possible if you push yourself. I was able to teach myself everything I needed to know for highschool. I defied everyone's expectations and got into college. I am ink splattered on a page. I am a book full of many chapters. I am like Tara Westover. We both struggled with our education and our families not accepting our thirst for knowledge. We fought to get to where we are now, no longer allowing our families to whisper lies in our ears and tell us that education is bad. Through many hardships, we secured our spots in college and we both felt as if we don't belong in college. But in the end, we proved we have just as much of a right to be here than anyone else.

Teaching My Children to Rise Above It

By Shaunte Lanham

What's been the most inspirational aspect of my learning process? As I look back on my educational experiences and think about where I am now, I can't help but want my children to have a nonstop drive for education and success. From my achievements and milestones in my children's education to my own obstacles at home in school and as a mother it's my responsibility to teach my children to rise above. Karl Zinsmeister, author of "Growing up Scared," talks about a lot of different issues we face every day with life and our children. Some are agreeable; others could be debatable in my eyes, but the main point behind this is our children and how we need to change a few issues for their success and our own. I'd like to highlight a few points from this reading that may or may not have helped me along my journey and learning process. Let's look at why schools should be sanctuaries for our children, how the one parent homes are trying to manage and how a family structure is in what we choose to do as grow into adults.

As I look back and wonder why my outlook on education in our society has changed so much, I wonder why our children don't feel safe at school or love to learn as I did? Karl Zinsmeister states, "Schools must be sanctuaries, where at minimum physical safety is guaranteed." He continues quoting Sandra Feldman, the president of New York City's teacher's union, 'If we can't ensure at least inside a school building or a schoolyard that there is still safety from chaos of the streets, then I fear for the future of our society'" (Zinsmeister 8). I believe in this idea to the fullest because as I was growing up, school was a safe place for me. School was my sanctuary up until I moved to Missouri. I kept straight A's, turned my assignments in, and was a young girl that wanted more than what my family had. School was my drive, my passion, and glow in life at that time. I was held to a different standard. As I got older, I still had the drive and ambition to do great things. Once I started getting singled out and was negatively labeled, I still kept my grades up, but my drive to be in my sanctuary where life disappeared had started to crumble. I no longer loved to learn; I didn't want to be there, and no one understood, or so it seemed. I eventually dropped out of high school. I was tired of being labeled as a bad guy when all I was doing was trying to learn and get an education so that I could be something great and help my family. I had earned my GED and finished my CNA certification before I had my first child on my own, but not with the same passion as I'd had when I was younger. As life went on, I became a stereotype, like my mom. I was a single mother by nineteen. I no longer had the drive for success. I just made up excuses. What if the school would have stopped to help me stay in school? Where would I be instead? Years went by and my animosity for the schools continued to grow. No longer was school my safe place or sanctuary; it was a place of hell for me. Nothing was going to change my mind; they took everything I worked so hard for and loved so much away from me and smashed my dreams. I did learn, as I got older and my children were in school, that I had to make sure their school and education was a sanctuary for them. I do everything in my power to make sure the obstacles that were overlooked through my education will not be the case for them.

No matter what obstacles I faced on my educational path, learning was going to be key in my children's lives and my own. I couldn't let my children go through the hell I went through trying to be someone or go somewhere in life. Now look, I'm a twenty-seven-year-old back in school as a single parent trying to highlight and embrace learning not only for my children, but

for myself as well. One-parent teaching, working, and learning. Karl Zinsmeister states, “One-parent students were consistently more likely to be late, truant, and subject to disciplinary action. One-parent children were found to be more than twice as likely to drop out of school altogether” (Zinsmeister 3). As I read that statement, I began to think about how I came from a one parent home, and I'm raising two children in a one parent home. How does this compare to my life? Well, it doesn't; I was pushed to get straight A's because that's what my mother knew I was capable of achieving. She pushed me so hard in school that not getting to school wasn't an option. I look at my children, and as a one-parent home, yes, I struggle, but I also make sure my children get an education now instead of going down the road I took and dropping out, trying to now finish a degree with two children, little help, and still managing to be a mother, student and worker. I want my children to succeed, and the only way that will happen is with support, whether it's one-parent or two-parents. I learned that we have to shape our children, lead them to be great, and no matter how many people are around, it only takes one person to motivate us to do better. It's all a learning process. Single parents may mess up because we're only one person doing the job of two, but I know as a one-parent home, I push myself harder to be a better mother, father, friend, role model, and educator to my children, so they don't have to dwell on or in the obstacles I've had to.

As the time went on, along with life, we try to understand where we have gone wrong. As Karl Zinsmeister states, “To say that family structure is now the principal conduit of class structure is not to deny that plenty of children in intact families have problems, or that many youngsters from single-parent homes will grow up to be happy and successful.” He continues, “The point is a serious blow from which a child recovers only with effort” (Zinsmeister 3). This is a very meaningful statement that makes a good point in society today. Even though everything I've dealt with over my years of education, I put forth the effort to continue. I put forth the effort at my son's school when his education started to go astray such as reading and writing not enhancing, along with the countless outbursts he was having. I stopped what I was doing to make sure that these issues didn't continue and that his education did. I've learned that no matter what happens in school, education, or just life itself, that we ourselves are the only ones that can prevent our own success. We have to put forth the effort and be motivated and driven to succeed.

Throughout my education experiences, obstacles, and milestones I refuse to let anything stop me from helping my children obtain their education, let alone derail my own; it's a decision. We not only have to push our children, but we have to show them the right way, even when it seems impossible. We need to make our schools safer so that they can be sanctuaries for our children to enjoy their learning. We also need to realize that no matter how many parents we have, or what our family structure is, as long as we put forth the effort, we can give our children hope and stability. I've learned a lot over my course of learning and education, and my journey is not over yet. Today, I am proud of my accomplishments in my education and where I stand right now because I could have given up on myself, like everyone else did, but I chose to rise above.

More Than Dead Trees and Lines of Ink

By Britny Maxwell

As a child reading was never really encouraged, so my literacy background is minimal. My parents read occasionally. Both read Stephen King books and murder-mystery novels. They did enjoy reading, but they were never the type of parents to push their passions or beliefs on to their children. I was free to discover and form my own opinions on many things. Often, I had bad grades and showed very little interest in school altogether. I can relate to "The Lonely, Good Company of Books" by Richard Rodriguez in the sense that reading was not initially a hobby. Anything that required me to read felt torturous. However, I later found myself captivated by the creativity found in books, like Rodriguez, and therefore, able to obtain the knowledge they had to offer.

In the beginning, reading was nothing more than a ploy to keep me from everything I wanted to do, which would have been anything else. Reading, at first, held no pleasure for me and I did everything I could to avoid it. It was exactly as Rodriguez described, "Reading was at best, only a chore. I needed to look up whole paragraphs of words in a dictionary. Lines of type were dizzying, the eye having to move slowly across the page, then down, and across" (203). Reading often caused me to have headaches and I found it hard to sit still long enough to focus on the words, let alone comprehend the meaning of anything written. It felt as though I was being punished for an act that was never committed. I had no interest in looking at pages of black and white when there was a world outside full color and adventure.

As a child reading was something that held very little value to me. My parents did not read to me when I was young, at least, not that I can remember. My parents read, but not often enough to leave an impression. Outside of school, books did not exist to me. I did not have someone who pushed me into reading and change my views of reading like Rodriguez did when he had remedial reading classes with a very old nun. Rodriguez shared, "I smiled just to listen to her. I sat there and sensed for the very first time some possibility of fellowship between a reader and a writer, a communication, never intimate like that I heard spoken words at home convey, but one nonetheless personal" (204). Reading was always a challenge for me. On my own, trying to read, the words always felt hollow like looking at a television of static. Knowing that something should be there but not knowing what. Although I understood the words individually, there was no meaning that resonated behind them. I was not able to make a connection with the author or characters and therefore, always felt as though the words presented were wasted on me.

Although I did not read books, I was required to read when playing video games. I did not struggle with reading in that format. The visuals were enticing and even though I had to read all the dialog, it never felt like reading a book. My experience when reading a book when I was younger was much like Rodriguez, "I tried to explain; said something about the way written words made me feel all alone... as when I spoke to myself in a room just emptied of furniture" (204). I had no passion for a story that I could not physically watch unfold. A book held no visuals and lacked involvement. Not only was reading lonely it was, at times, disheartening with no distractions and just an unwanted book for company. Even though it was holding conversations and questions on every page, they were never able to reach me and the adventures would never be revealed while in my possession.

It would not be until years later that I started to show interest in reading. It started with

manga and watching foreign shows that required me to read subtitles. It was during an ice storm, that knocked out power out for about a week, that I picked up and read some books laying around. The first one I read was *Wicked* by Gregory Maguire and then *Cell* by Stephen King. Just as the nun reassured Rodriguez, "Didn't I realize that reading would open up whole new world? A book could open doors for me. It could introduce me to people and show me places I never imagined existed" (204). Books allow us to escape to other worlds and possible they can grant us with a better understanding. We can glimpse into the past and gain a whole new perspective on how far we have come as a species. Reading allows for us to better educate ourselves and heighten our awareness overall. It lets us walk in someone else's shoes and awaken an awareness that was never there before.

Even though I now enjoy reading I will still struggle with books that do not draw me in quickly. If a book does not pique my interest within the first couple chapters I do not finish them, and they will be left to collect dust. I did not have the drive at a young age that Rodriguez illustrates, "I entered high school having read hundreds of books. My habit of reading made me a confident speaker and writer of English. Reading also enabled me to sense something of the shape, the major concerns, of Wester[n] thought" (205). Reading, while in high school, always felt forced and a waste of time. In hindsight, I should have been more focused, and reading could have helped me with that by expanding my way of thinking. I may have been able to gain a better understanding of what I wanted from myself at a younger age. Reading can change people and will open our minds to whole new point of views. Even if we do not agree with them, we still need to, at least, understand them.

Regardless of who a person is or where they come from, reading will always be an integral part of bettering ourselves by gaining knowledge and the ability to read into the deeper meaning of what is written. Like putting together a puzzle to find out the purpose of a piece. Sometimes a book can be an escape from the stress of our everyday lives. Reading can be a healthy vice when things around us become hectic. Also, we must keep ourselves educated to prevent passing on our ignorance to future generations. If given the chance, we need to display the same passion for reading as the nun did for Richard Rodriguez in "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," and instill that connection. Books are more than dead trees and lines of ink. They hold insight and knowledge. Books are gateways to the future, past and to worlds we would have never imagined on our own.

My Ideas of Education

By Tori McIntire

I despised school as a little kid. I wanted to be outside playing. For many students, school was a place to learn and explore but I felt confined. I was pretty terrible at school even when I tried my hardest so I quit trying by second grade. I was a poor student until eighth grade when a teacher sat down to ask me why I didn't try. Much like Richard Rodriguez in "The Lonely Good Company of Books", Rodriguez said he was a poor student, until a nun helped him learn to love reading. Rodriguez and I both had bad starts with school but one teacher, or nun in his case, helped change our views of school and education. Another book I relate to is Tara Westover's *Educated*. In *Educated*, Westover and her father did not think education was important. They felt a living should be earned with your hands and hard work, not through books. I always thought having a wide skill set, being hardworking, and able to work with your hands was more important than anything I was taught in school. Westover and I both left our families to go to school and learned the value of education. Westover and I both learned about current events and how they pertain to our own lives and we were changed by these new ideas. We can still go back to our families but we cannot go back to who we were or what we used to believe. I was changed by my education. My early school life was so much like Rodriguez's because we were both poor readers until a teacher helped us and my adult life is more like Westover's because my education changed my views on things like current events and religion, and changed who I am as well.

As a little kid, I saw reading as only a necessity, like Rodriguez. Rodriguez's parents could read and write but never did so for pleasure. Rodriguez said; "For both my parents, reading was done out of necessity and as quickly as possible" (Rodriguez 203). Rodriguez's parents would write letters to family members and read newspapers so he knew literacy was useful but he never saw it as enjoyable. I certainly did not find reading enjoyable. My dad could read and write but rarely did either. I occasionally found him with the comics or sports section out of the news paper but nothing else. My mother, however, did like to read. She read long, boring looking mystery/horror books. My mother would sit there silently, staring at the plain black and white pages, hardly moving. I thought it looked awful. I only ever saw reading and writing useful for school. Rodriguez said, "Reading was, at best, only a chore" (Rodriguez 203). I couldn't have agreed more. Reading required sitting still, staring at the lines of text when there was so much that I wanted to explore outside. Reading was a task I could hardly bare when I just wanted to go outside and play.

Rodriguez and I were both poor readers and ended up in remedial classes. Rodriguez said, "Lines of type were dizzying, the eye having to move slowly across the page, then down, and across... The sentences of the first books I read were coolly impersonal. Toned hard. What most bothered me, however, was the isolation reading required" (Rodriguez 203) Rodriguez found reading lonely and would become distracted and start talking to a friend whenever he sat down to read. His teachers had to put him in a remedial reading class so he could catch up to his classmates. I was also distracted as soon as I sat down to read, no matter how hard I tried. I would start chatting or stare out the window so I never got any work done. My second-grade teacher said I was lazy and playing stupid, but I was trying my best and I wasn't playing stupid so I thought maybe I really was stupid. In third grade the teacher suggested to my mom that I be screened for dyslexia and ADHD. I asked my mom what they were and ADHD sounded

just like me: jittery, distracted, talkative, forgetful, and the dyslexia might explain why I had a hard time following the lines of text. I thought I finally knew why I was different. But my dad declined the screenings. He said that I was smart so I couldn't have ADHD. He said it was over diagnosed and they just wanted to put me on drugs. I never found out if that's what I had but either way, I could not keep up with my classes so they put me in remedial classes. Rodriguez found his reason to read in remedial classes but I did not find mine for a few more years.

Rodriguez and I both had one influential teacher that changed our outlook on school and books. Rodriguez had the nun who would read to him. Rodriguez sat in the tiny room full of books. He loved everything about it. The noise from the janitor in the hall, the sun shining in, even just the smallness of it. Rodriguez said the nun would "Call the words alive with her voice, making it seem that the author somehow was speaking directly to me... I sat there and sensed for the very first time some possibility of fellowship between a reader and a writer, a communication" (Rodriguez 204). Reading changed for Rodriguez. He loved the idea of viewing new worlds through the eyes of the author. From then on, Rodriguez read all the important books his teachers could name for him. He mentioned all the classics he read like the Iliad, Moby Dick, Gone with the Wind, and The Scarlet Letter. The nun showed him a reason to love books and to love reading. For me, it was my eighth-grade teacher Mr. Weber. I did not try in school since I had decided I wasn't very smart and Mr. Weber was the first teacher to ask me why. I thought I was in trouble when he asked me to stay after class one day but all he did was ask me why I didn't turn in work. I explained that I got the same grades no matter how hard I tried so it wouldn't make a difference. Mr. Weber told me the work I turned in was very good and I could be a straight A student if I turned everything in. He suggested I try, just for a couple weeks and see what happens. I figured I would turn in the work just to prove him wrong. Once he saw that my grades stayed the same, he would have to admit that I was dumb. Except he was right. I had all As and Bs at the end of the two weeks. Then he assigned a book. Since I had recently made a habit of actually doing school work I figured I'd try reading the book for once. It was called *The Outsiders* and I couldn't believe we were allowed to read a book like that for school. It was about gangs, smoking, and stealing, and people died. For the first time I related to the characters in a book. I felt the communication Rodriguez felt when the nun read to him. I was all the boys in *The Outsiders*. I was Soda, bad at school but good with mechanics. I was Johnny, unwanted at home but accepted by hood rats. I was Dallas, angry at the world and stealing from the corner store. I was Tim Shepard, vandalizing and getting into fights. And I was Ponyboy, just trying to make things right in my world and be there for my friends who were more like a family to me than my real family sometimes. After that, I read everything I could. I loved to view the world from the eyes of different authors. I loved the old worlds I could visit when I read history books and the new worlds I could visit when I read fantasy books. As much as I loved Science fiction/Fantasy books, I may have loved classics even more, like Rodriguez. My favorites were *Gone with the Wind*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *Alice in Wonderland*. By the end of that year I was a straight A student without even trying and even throughout high school, I made all As.

Like Young Tara Westover and her dad, I still wasn't sure what books had to do with education. Westover's Father said, "A man can't make a living out of books and scraps of paper... how can you support a wife and children with books? (Westover 42). Westover's father thought that the only way to earn money and be successful was through hard work and having practical skills. He did not want his children to go to college and learn the useless information from

books. Westover's father made his children tend to the farm and work in a junk yard collecting scrap metal. He wanted them to be able to take care of themselves and their families in real situations. Tara Westover was not permitted to go to school when she was young, she had to learn to do physical work with her hands. Even though I was doing so well in school, I also thought it was useless to my future. I thought I knew what I should be studying more than the teachers and a generalized curriculum. I did not go to college. I learned skills instead. I thought being educated was an accumulation of all the skills a person could learn. Reading about history might be interesting but what good would it do if you need to change a tire or hem some jeans. Since I had moved out of my parents' house before I was out of high school, learning to care for myself was necessary. I learned to cook and sew and work on motorcycles. I learned how to garden and I grew my own food and pickled my extra vegetables to have less waste. I was proud of all the skills I had learned. Most teenagers I knew couldn't do any of that. When I looked at all my old friends from high school who had stayed at their parents' houses and went to college I thought, "Just because they have a degree, doesn't mean they are smarter than me; they can't do half what I can do and they have no actual work experience, all they can do is read a book and even I can do that!" But, like Westover, I had to learn the value of education in the real world to understand its practical uses.

Like Westover, I lost my religion and therefore, some family when I started to learn the meaning of education. Westover left her family to go to college and learned what she personally valued and realized that it didn't match the ideas of Mormonism that her family valued. Westover did not agree with the life her parents had planned for her. She did not want to be one of many wives, having children and under the control of her husband. Westover did not want the life of her mother. She wanted more than what Mormonism had to offer her and began to lose her faith. I lost mine when I met a friend, Michael Jerome, taught me his meaning of education. Jerome was raised Mormon and his parents did not allow him to attend school. As an adult, he started college with almost no basic education. He had to work twice as hard to catch up to his classmates. Jerome loved being educated and talked to me about it. His idea of education came from understanding current events and politics and seeing how they impacted his life. He also loved to learn about history to understand how our laws and government came to be what it is today. Jerome taught me about feminist movements like the fight for marriage equality in the 19th century and major events like Roe v. Wade and why they matter today. I was always taught to be modest and polite to avoid unwanted advances from men but he pointed out that no matter how a person dresses or acts, men don't have the right to touch or harm women. He showed me how each win in the history of women's rights was a step in the right direction but we need to keep working to have true equality. Jerome vastly changed my views on politics and other social norms as well. My family didn't mind though until I my views on religion changed too. Jerome asked me if I could stop a child from being abused, would I? I told him I absolutely would. Then he asked me why God does not. I pondered it for a few days before deciding that the world had too many evils and praying was not stopping them. We had to change them ourselves, and what could we do to change the wrongs in our country? Vote and influence others. I loved to talk with him and hear his views. He showed me how to think critically and form my own ideas. At first, I tried to talk to my family about my new ideas but they thought my views were radical and from Satan. They prayed that I would eventually grow out of it. Some told me not to come around anymore if I didn't have anything good to say. Like Westover, my family is still there and I can go back but I needed to create my own ideas.

Westover and I started to have very different views from our families. When Westover's brother called her the N word as a kid when her face would get greasy, she laughed, but when she learned what the word really meant and learned about slavery and the civil rights movements, she knew it was wrong and told him not to use that word. Westover said, "A thousand times I had been called Nigger and laughed, now I could not laugh. The word and the way Shawn said it hadn't changed; only my ears where different... never again would I allow myself to be made a foot soldier in a conflict I did not understand" (Westover 180-181). Westover laughed when she didn't understand the darkness behind the joke. She stood up to her brother now that she saw the wrongness of it. When I learned all the things wrong in my religion, I tried to stop my family too. My grandparents were always homophobic and tried to teach my brother and I to be that way as much as they could. At a family get together they started announcing that gays were going to hell and women these days get raped because they are immodest. I understand that they think this way because they are older Baptists but I knew it was wrong. I tried to speak up but I didn't have the words yet, and I was scared because I never told them that I liked girls. I realized that I lacked the vocabulary needed to change someone's mind. I needed to further my education.

My education is changing who I am the same way Westover was changed by her education. Westover knew she was a different person when she could not accept the wrongs of her family. When she was abused by her brother and her family tried to silence her, Westover could not call her old self out to deal with her family. She was not that person anymore. I am no longer the person who would allow my family to racist or sexist. I have my own views and I am learning how to express them. Westover said, "My life was narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It has never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs" (Westover 197) Westover had to find her own force and like her, I am starting to find mine.

These stories, "The Lonely Good Company of Books" by Richard Rodriguez and Tara Westover's *Educated*, had many similarities to my own education. I had to learn to love to read like Rodriguez, and I had to learn what it meant to be educated like Westover. I found my love of books in eighth grade but I didn't learn how to use the information from them until I became an adult. I had to learn that education is not just reading but understanding what I read and what the author was trying to convey. I am learning how to form my own thoughts and ideas and how to express them to others effectively. I have started college and I plan to explore as many different subjects as I can. I thought books opened up the worlds they contained but I'm starting to think they open my mind to the world around me. Everyone has their own voice and opinions and an education can help us understand our views and express them to others. Westover asked "What is a person to do when their obligations to their family conflict with other obligations - to friends, to society, to themselves? (Westover 317). Our families might mean well but everyone is different. We have to explore new ideas and decide for ourselves what we will value and stand for. Rodriguez and Westover had to learn the value of books and education even though their parents thought little of them. Sometimes we lose a friend our family member on the way but we have to keep perusing knowledge and new ideas and stand for what we feel is right.

A Lost Side of Education

By Saray Pilar

It was the beginning of a new school year, nothing new for everybody else, except me. I remember being in my fourth grade class and not understanding anything the other kids were talking about. I didn't speak the language because my first language was Spanish, although I didn't know anything, I was determined to learn. I came from a household where both English and Spanish were both spoken and even though my parents worked a lot to give my sister and I everything we needed, they barely had time to stay home and help me study new words I needed to learn. Therefore, I'd spend most of my time in my room practicing my reading with pre-school books even though I was in fourth grade. In the essay, "The Lonely Good Company of Books" by Richard Rodriguez, the author explains growing up with parents who spoke both English and Spanish and although his parents didn't support his reading, he learned to enjoy it! Even though Rodriguez and I are similar in the way that we grew up and the background we come from, we differ in the way that Rodriguez's passion for reading grew and mine stayed constant and forgotten. Although my passion for reading got lost, a lot of times I wished it would have improved because it would've made my life a lot easier in many different ways. Reading is an important everyday function and it's something that will always be used for communication and a way for people to express themselves.

Reading the Rodriguez's essay made me realize that I was very much like him when growing up. Just like him, I grew up in a family where English and Spanish were both spoken and they were both equally important for me to know. Although my family spoke Spanish most of the time, I would speak English mostly around my cousins because they didn't know Spanish. My parents worked a lot (they currently still do), so the only time I would see them read anything, would be when they were reading the bills that needed to be paid. I never really saw my parents pick up a book, a lot of that had to do with their work schedule, but I also know that reading wasn't a habit of theirs. In his essay, the author mentioned that his parents never read for pleasure yet instead for necessity (203). The author also mentioned his mother instructions every year before school started, "Don't write in you books so we can sell them at the end of the year" (203). I can relate to that quote because growing up we didn't have a lot of money, sometimes we would have to reuse school supplies we had from previous years for the next school year, and that rule of "not writing on the books so they can be resold" I take very serious now that I'm a college student, because each book costs from \$20- \$100 a piece and that's a luxury I can't afford. Small details like these might not seem important now, but these childhood memories made a big impact on my reading; because in a way they made me want to learn and read more due to me seeing the sacrifices my parents made for my education.

From reading Rodriguez's essay, I also found a few differences the author and I shared. For example, he had a passion for reading, on the other hand, that is something I can't promise I'll ever have. Growing up, my parents were never "stay at home parents" therefore, they didn't really have time to read for my sister and I, for this reason, we pretty much had to learn on our own. I only had two or three teachers that actually helped me with my reading, the other ones saw me struggle and didn't bother to help me. I remember like it was yesterday, my fourth grade teacher Mrs. Murdock, would sit down one on one with me and help me with my reading, she's the only one that ever put her full time and energy on waking up my interest in reading, an interest that would fade as I got older. I was never pushed enough to read on a regular basis, but

sometimes, I wished I had been. The author read so much that even his own mother thought, "What do you see in your books? Was so much reading even healthy for a boy" (204). I think if my mother would've ever seen me reading that much she would've probably been impressed by it. The author also mentions the feeling he got from reading, " In spite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the good company of books" (205). Everybody has their own hobbies that they have to relax to get their minds off certain thoughts, Rodriguez's was reading, but mine could never be reading because seeing all the words and trying to read when I'm trying to relax would make me a little impatient and irritated. My hobby when I try to relax is just closing my eyes and listen to relaxing music by some of my favorite artists such as: Jhene Aiko, Lana Del Rey, Alina Baraz, Sabrina Claudio, Kali Uchis and Nykee Heaton. Their music is relaxing to me and that is my main, if not, one of my favorite hobbies.

It can be assumed that the author's favorite hobby was reading, because he mentions reading a lot of books, which was impressive for him to do at his age. Rodriguez explains, " I entered high school having read hundreds of books. My habit of reading made me a confident speaker and writer of English" (205). I would've never been able to do that because I don't like reading and I am really picky with what I choose to read. My high school experience was the complete opposite. I wasn't really asked by any of my teachers to read any books until my senior year (unless being obligated to read Romeo and Juliet as a freshman counts). The books I had to read my senior year were all provided by my teacher. I remember reading Shakespeare and Edgar Allan Poe, I enjoyed Poe a little more because Shakespeare was very boring with his vocabulary. Unlike the author, my experience with reading wasn't the best. I never felt the same way he did towards reading and I don't think I'll ever experience the strong passion he had towards it. Although the author mentions that reading made him more confident as a speaker, I wished reading would've made me feel that type of way also.

Even though Rodriguez and I had multiple differences academically, I wished I would have been a better reader and felt different towards reading. I wished my reading skills were better because they have consistently affected with the way I perform in school. For example, I was put in classes for starters instead of the average classes that other students take. I also think I would've gotten a better ACT scores in high school because they always told me that reading was one of the most important skills for these types of tests, and they weren't lying. I struggled taking the ACT because it was a timed test and I took my time reading passages and I would always have to guess on the last questions. I also think reading would help me to be a better writer because my vocabulary would be a lot more substantial when I write my essays. Therefore, if I were like Rodriguez a little more in the way that he has a passion for reading, my school experience would have been a lot easier than it has been. In the future, I hope to introduce my kids to reading at an early age. I'd like for my future kids to make reading a normal activity in their lifestyle because it'll prepare them for school and it'll take some stress off their shoulders if they're educated at an early age. My goal for next year is to get my three year old sister a book collection and for her and I to start reading a book at least once a week. Just like the poster that the author saw above the nun's desk that read " OPEN THE DOORS OF YOUR MIND WITH BOOKS"(203), I know that reading can open a lot of doors to different places. I'm not sure if I will ever find my passion for reading again, but at least I'd like to change the futures of the young minds that cross my path, whether is my baby sister or my future kids, reading will always be an important part of their lives.

Learning Stages

By Jaylin Powell

Many people confuse having an education with and being educated. Society perceives if a person attends an institution of higher learning implies that they are smart or educated and this isn't true. Education is the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction. The way you test your "smartness" is by taking standardized test from a book; and doesn't make you educated it makes you trainable. So, you might ask what it means to be educated. To be educated is to have a certain mindset. To be educated is to be able to listen and think critically. To be educated is to want to explore through viewpoints of others. These authors stories of education provided insight to the definition of being educated. In "Educated" by Tara Westover, "Superman and Me" by Sherman Alexie and "How I Learned to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass. Pieces of their stories reveals my definition of being educated and the meaning of success and failure. Sherman Alexie and I share the same determination on not becoming a stereotype. Tara Westover and I both share the same learning experiences in our early childhood. Frederick Douglass and I have the same dedication towards learning to improve our life. To understand the concept of being educated I analyzed my life and broke it up into three sections. These sections are childhood, schooling and adulthood; these sections are called the "learning stages of life". In these stages of life, I've learned valuable information on the definition of being educated.

Like Westover, my first stage of learning didn't take place at school. My educational journey began at home. My surroundings were the school and my family were my teachers. Westover states "I been educated in the rhythms of the mountains, rhythms in which change is never fundamental..." (Westover xxi). This is true for everyone. Before I was the age to attend school, I was taught by the adults that were in my life. My grandma always told that "A child's mind is like a sponge; it will soak up whatever material you give them." As a child, everything we did was because of our parents. We learn to talk like our parents, walk like our parents, eat the food our parents like and have the same beliefs as our parents. At the age of five, I had no idea what the concept of religion, but as I knew I was a Christian. I had no idea what the English language was, but I knew how to speak it. Growing up the grandson of a former sharecropper and schoolteacher have shaped me into the man I am today. My grandparents are from the south. My grandfather is from Arkansas and my grandmother is from Mississippi. This cause me to have a southern accent although I was raised in Missouri. This is because children naturally mimic what around them. I've learned from the experiences my elders acquired throughout their lives. Similar to Westover's childhood I am also a product of my environment.

Author Sherman Alexie and I share similar views on success and failure. My second stage of learning takes place in the classroom. Being Native American Alexie had to fight against stereotypes that were placed in his life by white America. Alexie says "As Indian children, we were expected to fail in the non-Indian world. Those who failed were ceremonially accepted by other Indians and appropriately pitied by non-Indians" (Alexie 2). Alexie views failure as being "another Indian" and he refused to become one; Alexie and I both view failure as becoming a stereotype. Growing up African American I faced Stereotypes throughout my schooling career. As a child, I was forced to sit with the other black students during lunch and in the classroom. In the class, I wouldn't talk much because I knew how harsh the other kids were to me and my peers. In the fifth grade, I was introduced into the block schedule system because the school

wanted us to get accustomed to the way middle school and high school classes worked. The block schedule system is going from class to class every hour opposed to staying in your homeroom teacher class all day. For this to work the entire 5th-grade class was broken up into 3 groups of 20 students. Each group would go from class to class every two hours. The first group was all the 5th graders who were in the galactic program. This program was for all the students who were "gifted". The second group was the average students and the third group were below average students. At the time I didn't see anything wrong with the classification we were in. in retrospect, this was terrible because all the black students were placed in the third group and the other two groups were fully white. The second group had the chance to test out of that group and if they did, they would move to the first group with the gifted students. I was placed in the third group and we never had the option to test out. The teachers mistook my quietness as a lack of knowledge, and this was the same for all African American students. Non-Afro Americans teachers put African American students in one category because they felt that blacks aren't as smart the other students. I knew I was smart and artistic and a good student just like Alexie. The stereotypes I was faced with made me want to become successful. Alexie and I both define success as becoming a man and not a statistic.

The third learning stage takes place inside of you. My whole life has been about learning in school through a book. This isn't a bad thing; it trains your mind into thinking systematically. To become educated you must have the curiosity for learning. Like Fredrick Douglass, my devotion to learning is the key to become educated. Fredrick Douglass was a former slave who educated himself to become the spokesman for all slaves. People of color were deprived of learning because it was believed that literacy was a threat to the institution of slavery. Douglass knew this to be true and he wanted to break the cycle of slavery. Being a former slave Douglass never understood how to sever slavery was until he started learning on his own. Douglass says "I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It opened my eyes to the horrible pit, but to no ladder upon which to get out. In moments of agony, I envied my fellow-slaves for their stupidity" (Douglass 191). As Douglass became more educated, he views slavery differently. Douglass's curiosity for learning cause him to see the living condition of the common slave. Without learning on his own time, he wouldn't be to leave the slave mentality behind. Douglass's story is relevant to society today and gives a great message about learning. Similar to slavery in the late 1800's education is common for everyone in today's society. The vast majority of America has had an education; therefore, basic education isn't good enough. To become educated you must go beyond what's commonly taught and learn on your own. If Douglass didn't decide to educate himself, he would have stayed a slave.

Throughout life I've have three major stages of learning. The first stage takes place early in my childhood. This stage is involves learning from my environment and family. The second stage of learning took place inside of the classroom. In this stage I didn't learn material in the classroom I learned what failure and success meant to me. The last and final stage of the learning took place within me. In this stage I learned the true definition of education and being educated. Education is the process of learning while educated is a mindset. Everyone in America has the same opportunity of an education but, not everyone is educated. To become educated you must have the curiosity to learn. Towards the ending of Tara Westover book educated Westover finally understood what it means to become educated. Westover realized that she wasn't educated because she got her PHO, but she's educated because she wanted to learn. This is the same for Fredrick Douglass in "How I learned to read". For Douglass education didn't

make him become educated. He became educated when he wanted to learn. Sherman Alexie became educated when he knew he didn't want to become average. To Alexie being average is the same as being a failure. AB these writers have the same vision and determinate to becoming successful. They all looked at their position in life and wanted to change it.

The Love of Learning

By Rachel Powell

Parents that engage with their children at an early age will make a big impact on their education as they grow up. In the essay "One Writer's Beginnings," Eudora Welty, an American author, discusses her own experiences on how important it is for parents to start working with their children at a young age by reading with them and introducing the love of learning. My mother and grandmother read to me every day; it was one of the best parts of our daily routine. Now that I am grown and have a child of my own, I get to pass this on to her. Even though we differ in the paths that we initially took, Welty and I are similar in the way of having parents that engaged with us as young children instilling the love of reading and learning.

Those early memories of my mother reading to me as a very young girl are special to me and I will never let them go. Welty got to experience those similar memories. For example, Welty agrees that, "My mother read to me. She'd read to me in the big bedroom in the mornings, when we were in her rocker together, which ticked in rhythm as we rocked, as though we had a cricket accompanying the story" (206). Hearing Welty's experiences with her mother brought back those special memories I had with my mother when I was a little girl, letting me relive them in my own way, as I sit here smiling. My grandmother had a rocker that she passed on to my mother and it is now passed on to me, it's been passed down three to four generations. I remember we had hard wood floors, so when my mother would read to me, the floors would creek as the rocker would go back and forth and would tick in rhythm as Welty described. I loved that feeling of comfort being on my mother's lap while she read to me. There was nothing better than that, I felt secure and so loved.

Having parents that started reading to us and teaching us the alphabet when we were so young was important because it gave us a head start before going to school. The alphabet was something that had to be learned before we were taught how to read. Welty acknowledges that, "They taught it to me at home in time for me to begin to read before starting school" (208). If it wasn't for our parents engaging with us, then we would have been behind which would have had a big impact on our education in the future. I am so thankful for my mother and grandmother for taking the extra time to spend on developing my literacy. They were teaching me as early as two years old what was important to our morals and values as a family. Welty's family reminded me a lot like my own as far as what we were taught at an early age. Welty agrees that, "You learned the alphabet as you learned to count to ten, as you learned 'Now I lay me' and the Lord's Prayer and your father's and mother's name and address and telephone number, all in case you were lost" (208). These all played an important part in our childhood. Not all children have parents that read to them or take the time to work with them. It's so sad to think that some of these children didn't even get the chance to experience it. These are crucial to a child's growth.

Our mothers did more than just get us some toys that we would barely play with, they got us that one present that would open our minds and help us develop our literacy. I would always be so excited to open it to see what it would reveal, a new book! I could always count on getting awesome new books for every birthday, Christmas and other holidays. Welty and I were able to share the same excitement for reading. Welty agrees that, "I was presented, from as early as I can remember, with books of my own, which appeared on my birthday and Christmas morning" (207). If our parents didn't start reading to us and help us open our imaginations so young, then we wouldn't have been so thrilled to receive new books. Sometimes my mother would come

home from work and unexpectedly bring a new book home to me. I remember her bringing the Junie B. Jones books home to me one at a time. At that age, I was so excited because I was able to read a whole book by myself and it made me feel grown. Junie B. Jones was a bratty little girl with a lot of attitude. I was the opposite, so it was fun to read about her. I was easily entertained by those books. I loved that my mother did that for me, I felt very lucky. I always knew that when it got dark outside and after I took a bath, it was reading time, my favorite part of the day.

Although I don't know what Welty's teen years brought her, mine ended up taking a wrong turn. At first, high school started off great for me. I was on the A-B honor roll and I still loved to learn and did well. I was a really good basketball player, I started playing at a high level at Benton High School. We went to state three years in a row and won the state championship one of those years. It was self-rewarding, but it was short lived come my senior year of high school. I started hanging out with people two and three years older than me. They were young adults that didn't end up going to college. I planned to go to college and had smaller level colleges looking to give me a basketball scholarship. But my senior year I messed that up. I started skipping school because I was hanging out with these older people and I was partying with them. I was trying to be grown and didn't realize how bad it was going to affect my life after that. My grades dropped significantly, and I walked off the basketball team for good. That was the worst mistake I could have made. I did graduate high school but after that all I wanted to do was party and lost my love for learning and reading for quite a few years. I always knew I would go to college one day and I really wanted to. I got mixed up in some bad stuff and didn't know how to fix it, I was lost. When I met my daughter's dad I was getting better, and I ended up getting pregnant. That was a game changer. I know that having my daughter changed my life. That was the best blessing that God has given me. I was able to change my life around completely. From then on, I knew that it wasn't about me anymore, now its all about Charlee Kay.

Now that I am grown and have a daughter of my own, I get to pass on the love of learning to my little girl. I get to read to her in the same rocker that my mother read to me in and the same rocker that her mother read to her in. Charlee loves it just as much as I did. She will grab a book and run over to the rocker while she pats the seat saying, "mama sit, mama sit" and I smile big with joy. When she picks a book that she really likes she will have me read it over and over and over. I love it because I get to see that same excitement in her face that I had when I was a little girl. I work with my daughter on a regular basis teaching her how to count. Charlee is two years old and can count to twenty, there are just a few numbers that she misses but for the most part she does great. She can say most of the Lord's Prayer because we say it everyday before we eat. It's so cute watching her pray because she will have her hands put together in front of her face, peeking out of one eye at me making sure I have my eyes closed and my hands put together. We are currently working on the alphabet. It's a little trickier for some reason but she is determined to learn it. She will have it down in now time. She loves to conquer new obstacles just like I was when I was young. I am blessed that I can pass this legacy on to my daughter and watch her grow loving to read and learn, there is nothing better than that. As parents we must lead by example, that is what I am now doing with Charlee. I want to make sure she is prepared before school starts so she will excel. In most cases, if a child is doing good in school then they will like it more, if they aren't doing so well or haven't had anyone spend the time to teach them then they will dislike it.

It is important to engage with our children while they are young and instill the love of

reading and learning so that they can grow to enjoy it and succeed in their education. I will never forget all that my mother taught me and how it shaped me into who I am today. It's been ten years since I've been in high school. Now I am twenty-nine years old and just starting college. I was really nervous at first because I didn't know how much would come back to me. My very first paper I wrote in college I received an A on. I was so proud of myself and it made me realize how much I value my education and how important it is to me. I get to experience that love for learning all over again as an adult and it is amazing. I am so thankful for my mother and everything she did for me, and it is all paying off. Now I get to do the same for my daughter and help her develop her literacy and watch her grow into a beautiful educated young woman.

The Voice Inside my Head

By Brittinae Tarrence

In the essay, *The Watcher at the Gates* by Gail Godwin, the author mentioned her own experience with writing and many of the struggles she endured. Writing did not come easy for her because of the watcher inside her head. The watcher judged every single decision Godwin made about writing. The watcher is her inner critic. This watcher affected Godwin's ability to write until she decided to learn more about the watcher inside her head. I can relate to her because I have a watcher inside my head. Every person has a watcher inside their head, which often comes in the form of their conscience, that forms the decisions they make. I managed to control my watcher, but the watcher has not completely gone away. She appears when I try to write an essay by telling me, "You are not writing the correct way, delete every word on your paper". My ability to write is impaired by the different states of my watcher which are: procrastination, anxiety, and self-judgement.

The first state my watcher comes in is procrastination. As Godwin wrote, "It is amazing the lengths a Watcher will go to keep you from pursuing the flow of your imagination" (Godwin 194). The state of the watcher Godwin is referring to is procrastination. Procrastination can be referred to as many different things. I suffer from the excessive use of procrastination, especially when it comes to writing. I love writing, but my watcher makes me hate it. For example, my watcher convinced me that two pages was not that much to write. This altered the decision to write my paper at the very last minute. When I attempt to write a paper I find myself getting lost in something else. My watcher will tell me "Look at your phone, maybe someone messaged you". I find myself off topic and unsure of what my next sentence should be. She will also say "Take a nap, remember you are tired you need rest". This time, the decision to listen to my watcher led to me running out of time to finish my paper with the deadline for this paper approaching in two days. I eventually drown the watcher out with positive thoughts and complete my essay on time.

Anxiety is the second state of my watcher that causes my lack of confidence. I suffer from severe anxiety and find writing a struggle most of the time. The constant thought of failure lingers in my mind when I try to write. This form of my watcher makes me a perfectionist and makes me want to complete my paper right the first time. For example, Godwin wrote "'What's the good of writing out a whole page,' he whispers begrudgingly, 'if you just have to write it over and over again later? Get it write the first time!'" (Godwin 194). Godwin exemplifies some of the same traits I possess. I find myself trying to complete my essay correctly the first time. In reality, the correct way to write is to have multiple drafts. I have learned to ignore the worrisome thoughts and substitute them with positive thoughts. I still find my watcher sneaking in from time to time to mess up the flow of my writing. However; I remind myself that no one has a perfect first draft and I can write this essay and be successful.

Self-judgement is the last state of my watcher. I am the hardest critic on myself and find myself judging every decision I make. People can tell me "Your paper sounds good. You are on the right track." The voice in my head contradicts these statements and substitutes it with my own. I will still assume my paper is terrible and I have no clue how to write correctly. Godwin had a watcher at her gates and I have a watcher at my gates, too. One has to get to know their watcher and not let them affect their ability to write. This is what Godwin did and what I have come to realize. Every individual has a watcher in their head and they come in different forms. Godwin said, "I discussed him with other writers, who told me about some of the quirks and

habits of their Watchers, each of whom was an individual as his host, and all of whom seemed passionately dedicated to one goal: rejecting too soon and discriminating too severely” (Godwin 194). The watcher inside your head is your inner critic and will judge you harshly. For example, I find myself judging my ability to be successful or a good writer. The self-judgment my watcher inflicts on myself leads to lack of confidence, worrisome thoughts, and impaired writing.

Many people suffer from the watcher inside their head, which often comes in the form of their conscience, which forms the decisions they make. My watcher comes in the form of procrastination, anxiety, and self-judgment. Godwin managed to control her watcher and learned how to write efficiently. I still struggle with controlling my watcher and have not learned how to write efficiently. The forms of my watcher impair my ability to write and have made English 100 a struggle for me. I have learned some basic skills in this class, but my watcher still remains.

Bird set free

By Orn-Phinyamars Seeaun

I was one of the birds in the silver cage. The owners didn't feed us with the purified water nor chubby worms in every meal. Only enough for us to stay alive and keep on singing, in hope that one day our sweet voices will bring the fortune to them. I was jealous of that one bird in the golden cage. He was fed with purified water and chubby worms in every meal. It was those colorful wings that satisfied the owners' eyes, even though he has never known how to flap his own beautiful wings. It was literacy that saved my life and brought me out of that silver cage, before I died starving for food and freedom. Like the other stories that I read, literacy played a big role in each of them. In "Superman and Me" by Sherman Alexie and "How I Learned to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass, their stories have similarity to my story. Both Alexie and Douglass used literacy to break out of their cages, to have freedom and to have a better life. We all came from a place that literacy was limited in some way; Alexie was the Indian boy who the world expected to be poor and stupid, Douglass was a slave that was not allowed to learn how read and write, and I was a girl who was trapped in the path of literacy for financial expectation. Learning to read and write are not just for breaking the stereotype of societies expectations, but we learn to free ourselves, to make our own choices.

It doesn't matter how people expected us to be, it only matters what we expected ourselves to be. Alexie and I have similarity of life expectation by those who glimpse at us for a minute and made a decision for our whole lives. "We were Indian children who were expected to be stupid," Alexie described his life expectation by white people (Alexie 186). It was the stereotype that he cannot change as an Indian, but it was unfair that people made a decision for his whole life as a stupid Indian. People expected me to be poor and live my life as poor people supposed to be; ungraduated, work as a laborer, and continue my poor family to the next generation. But I did not choose to be born poor and I will not choose to stay poor. People judged me by my stereotype, but they would not get to make a decision for my life. I got to decide it for my own. Alexie and I made a decision for ourselves, we decided to break through the stereotypes and create our own expectations. Alexie said, "I refused to fail. I was smart. I was arrogant. I was lucky" (Alexie 187). He decided that he would not be a stupid Indian boy and that he used literacy to break through his cage of stereotype. He expected to set himself free from the decision that the others made for him. And I decided not to be poor. I broke through my stereotype of poorness; I graduated my first college in Thailand before I moved to United State, I worked for a big company there, and I upgraded my family life with financial security. I changed not just my own expectation but also my whole family's expectation, I changed their hope. Who would have time to dream of a better future when all they have to do was worry about putting food on the table and putting kids in school? But my literacy paid off very well for my parents' sacrificing, it was our only way out of this cage. Without literacy I would not know what else will be strong enough to break through the cage of stereotype, nor what else can set me free from life that had been designed by the aspect of others which I might fall for, without my literacy.

We are birds that were born in the different parts of the world; we fly looking for food to keep ourselves alive. We fly looking for a safe place to live. We fly because we have our own wings as our freedom. People were not born with wings, but people created wings for themselves; wings of freedom- literacy of freedom. Douglass was a slave and a slave was not

allowed to have wings. He was living with his master just like the other slaves but he was lucky, his master's wife taught him how to read. If you want to keep the birds in the cage, you should not teach them how to open the door. Douglass's master made that big mistake as Douglass described, "If I was in a separated room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called to give an account of myself. All this, however, was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell" (Douglass 190). He pointed his way out of a slave life even though he might not understand at that time, but people who loved to learn like Douglass would not let anything stop him from getting literacy. My life was a bit differ from Douglass's; I did not love to learn as much as he was, but I was looking for my way out of being poor and being oppressed. Just like him, I have no freedom to design my own life. I was a product of a poor family that expected me to solve their problem using the education that they forced me to achieve, and I realized that this was also my way out. So I kept on learning until one day it enough for me to create my own voice, to confront my family and say to them that I will design a life of my own. Like Douglass said, "I looked forward to a time at which it would be safe for me to escape. I was too young to think of doing so immediately; besides, I wished to learn how to write, as I might have occasion to write my own pass. I consoled myself with the hope that I should one day find a good chance. Meanwhile, I would learn to write" (Douglass 192). He needed to prepare himself as he knew, literacy cannot be learned in one day. He patiently practiced by himself until he finally succeeded in learning how to write. I was the same as Douglass; I was patiently learning and accumulated my knowledge for my escape. I wanted to leave my chaos family and the burden that was putting on me since my birth, I wanted to be free. As soon as I graduated my first college, I felt my voice grew stronger and louder. I confronted my family and told them what I want to do from now on. Agree with me or not, they knew that I have my own voice now. And that also mean I am ready to escape whenever I wanted to.

Now I am a free person; it's not because I escaped from my motherland to the United State, but it's because I made choices for myself. I made my choice to come here for work and study and I made my choice to go back to college here after that. I chose to study for myself to achieve my own expectations of knowledge and a career. I am roaring with my strong voice of freedom. Like Alexie, he achieved his own expectation of literacy. He became the author and a teacher for the Indian boys. He is a free bird from stereotype and expectation of the others but himself, and he is trying to help those boys. He wanted to set those birds free.

My wings are spreading out wide and strong, they broke the cage open for me; Wings of freedom-wings of literacy. I felt sorry for those who did not know how to create wings for themselves, and those whose wings were putting on by the others, but still they did not know how to fly. I might be lucky got trapped in a path that I was hungry for freedom, so I appreciated my wings of literacy to set me free from my stereotype. Like Alexie and Douglass, they broke through every barriers of life to pursue freedom and literacy, to save themselves and to save others. I wished that people believe in themselves as much as they believe in literacy. I would tell my story to my kids of how my life was saved by it, and I would tell the same story to grandkids of how their lives would be change by it. There is no execution of not learning. So does the harm of learning to save yourself. Literacy save lives and can create a new one for those who believe in it. If you want to spread your free wings, you need to learn how to break through your cage.

Radioactive Essay

By Kory Walts

Literacy is a super power. Few can really tap into their writing skills enough to see their own literacy power manifest. Why is that some people like Sherman Alexie author of “The Joy Of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me” was able to see the world as little individual paragraphs when he first found the meaning of the word? Why is it some people are able to put words together that can completely submerge you in an ocean of feelings? Like when Russel Baker’s essay about “The Art of Eating Spaghetti” made his entire class laugh with enjoyment and hang on each word with genuine interest. Perhaps it’s your upbringing or influences on reading and writing. An example of lack of influence is when Kathy Frost, my interviewee, only knew the T.V. guide and reader’s digest as literature in her childhood home. I can remember having experiences in both reading and writing that helped me appreciate the importance behind becoming literate. So it begs the questions. What do you hope to gain from becoming literate? What causes you to be driven enough to learn to read and write?

In my Adolescent years I didn’t have as much interest in reading as Native American writer Alexie did at an early age. Alexie describes himself as a self-taught lower middle class Indian kid who fell in love reading at an early age. It helped that reading was a part of his family before he had his own experiences. Alexie remembers his father as the original bookworm. In his childhood home, his dad would have rooms filled with books in piles that would tower over young Alexie. However, the author’s love for reading came before he could read a whole sentence. His passion for reading originated from teaching himself what a paragraph was and that understanding blossomed into a realization that paragraphs were just fenced in little pieces of the world’s story around us. Alexie described it as a paradigm shift completely changing his world perspective. The author underlines this when he said “ The words inside a paragraph worked together for a common purpose. They had some specific reason for being inside the same fence. This knowledge delighted me. I began to think of everything in terms of a paragraphs” (Alexie 187). As for myself, I didn’t find any real interest in reading until my teenage years. Unlike Alexie I was a child who was more interested in what was on the TV and what levels I need to beat in my favorite video games. I was in fifth grade when I really tried to read something that I didn’t absolutely have to. The book that captured my interest was *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*. Man, just a few pages in and I felt fully engulfed in the story. It was like I could see the whole wizarding world come to life within each page. After that my nose was stuck in a Harry Potter book of some sort and then other fictional book series about supernatural mysteries. So I guess it took me longer than Alexie did to find his passion in reading. The results however were the same. We both needed an experience with literacy that was impactful enough to fuel our interest in reading.

My most vivid memory of writing was when I wrote a poem called “The Father That Always Tried” in sixth grade English and just like Russel Baker, author of “Learning to Write,” I found writing was much easier when you are writing about something that could create an impactful emotion drawn from memories. Mrs Wagner, my 6th grade English teacher, told us “Write about something that has a deep emotion behind it and it will pour out of you and into your paper effortlessly.” Boy, was she right! I was moving that Number Two pencil fast and felt like the words were all but falling out of my brain. The poem I was creating was about how my dad witnessed his wife pass away and how he still managed to keep it together enough to take

care of his son. When I finished I must have reread the poem a dozen times in my head. Beaming with pride I asked my teacher if I could read it out loud. She agreed and after I finished I nervously looked at the faces of my fellow students. They were all either wide-eyed and shocked or still had a few tears welled up in their eyes. Since I still hadn't mastered social clues, I felt like I did something wrong or overshared. Mrs Wagner pulled me aside after class and told me that when she assigns this she normally gets something about bad injuries, video games, or vacations. She looked at me earnestly and said my poem was moving and I should be very proud. Later that day, when I got off the bus I sprinted toward home and when I arrived winded and out of breath, I mustered to my dad "Please...read." My dad grabbed the now crumpled paper and read the poem. A few moments later, heavy tears were falling from his cheek. He quickly wrapped me up in a warm loving hug. I could see him brimming with pride when he said in a soft and almost shaky voice, "That was beautiful, son." Like I said earlier Baker described a similar experience with his English teacher. The author recalls being assigned an essay with the most dull and boring topics to choose from. He recalled the most simpleminded one from the list was the infamous "What I Did on My Summer Vacation." Once he was home from school, grudgingly, Russel started to work on the essay. He pulled the list out and found a surprisingly interesting topic in the dull list he was given to choose from "The Art of Eating Spaghetti". This title washed over Russel with warm nostalgic feelings of the time he was having a family dinner at his uncle Allens house and the laugh arguments they had that night about the best way to maneuver spaghetti from plate to mouth. The author drives his point home when he said "Suddenly I wanted to write about that, about the warmth and good feeling of it, but I wanted to put it down simply for my own joy, not for Mr. Fleagle" (Baker 189). So it's safe to say that the most fulfilling and quality writing comes from a topic that captures your interest the most.

Your parents relationship with reading will affects your drive to want to become literate. Both Kathy and I come from a household that had few to no books. However, I know growing up my father's version of literature lying about the house, was *National Enquire* magazines with some kind of click bait title like "The Queen is a Lizard Person." My interviewee's parent did not have the same taste in reading material as my father did. In fact she said her childhood reading options at home were a bit duller with it being just the *Reader Digest* or the *TV Guide*. Kathy admits her family didn't read much when she was growing up and did not provide her with the praise or guidance she felt she needed with her education. This is where Kathy and I differ, because my father played a part in my education. With his praise when I succeeded and assistance when I slacked, I think I was able to realize the importance of reading and writing a bit sooner because of that. Kathy also admits that she did not have any reading material in her household with her two sons. Kathy described the extent of her reading and writing in her professional life consisted of work manuals and union books to help her with payroll and other parts of her job. As for personal use, facebook messages and texts to her pool league is about as far as it goes for her when it comes to reading and writing. Kathy only tried college later in her life around age fifty when she lost a secretary job. She figured that in her fifties she has accumulated enough administrative experience with secretary work that she could go to college and become a paralegal. Unfortunately, Kathy dropped out before she could receive her paralegal degree. Her reasoning was that she felt the pressure of being a full time employee and struggled with getting all of her homework done in time. It seems for Kathy a higher education is important, but she didn't find her "need" for college until she was in her fifties and lost her job. It was only then she found a driver that motivated her enough to at least try. I wonder if I had

the same support as Kathy did growing up would it have taken me longer to realize I needed to go back to college? Perhaps, if Kathy had the support my father gave me would she have tried to become a paralegal sooner? It stands to reason both Kathy and I could have saved a lot of time and heart ache if we had more influences with reading in our childhood and a solid motivator to push us toward furthering our education.

The one thing we all shared in common was one way or another we all had an event in our life that pushed us into wanting to learn more. Alexi had his paragraph paradigm shift, Baker had his fun topic "The Art of Eating Spaghetti," Kathy lost her secretary job that inspired her to go to college and I found a book series that captured my attention and a therapeutic topic to write about. So I would say to find your inner literacy super power you must first ask yourself some self evaluating questions and then reflect on impactful experiences in you life that has shaped your character. Once that is done you will be able to piece together what drives you to become a more literate person. Besides, doing this beats waiting around for a radioactive essay to paper cut some literacy into you.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



IN THE WORDS OF THE
STUDENTS' ENGLISH 100 INSTRUCTORS

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



Ernest Hemingway

Kartyr Bigham: Kartyr once told me that she is “the most responsible irresponsible person” and as crazy as this statement seems, it is also true. Kartyr has a very chaotic life; balancing her school work with all other aspects of her life is difficult. However, when it comes to the important things, she is responsible – committed and passionate. An example of this is the work she did for her published Task Three essay, “Mental Illness and Family,” where she writes about her own family as well as the Westover family in Tara Westover’s memoir *Educated*. Kartyr felt strongly about the book and its discussion of the impact of mental illness on everyone in a family. Her discussions in class were emotive and enlightening. And this passion carried over into her essay. But more than passion, this task illustrated to me the level of responsibility Kartyr can possess when something has meaning to her. Over our winter break, Kartyr was revising this essay for submission, emailing me with questions and concerns. I was happy to respond because I was seeing her learning and writing processes progress and that she was grasping the power that language – the language of others, like Tara Westover as well as her own language – can have. - Dawn Terrick

Sarah Brown: Sarah Brown is a joy to have in the classroom—her energy and positivity brightens the room. Her writing is the same: positive, funny, and meaningful. In her publication piece, “Elizabeth Marie,” Sarah tackles a tough topic: the rape of her sister and the subsequent birth of her niece. For this paper, Sarah interviewed her sister, piecing together the events and her own reactions to them. Most moving to me were the parts of the essay when Sarah reinforces her sister’s blamelessness and discusses her love for her niece, Elizabeth Marie. Writing about sensitive topics is difficult for us all, but Sarah navigates the piece with the same positivity and thoughtfulness that she does in the seated classroom. She should be proud of her work on not only this paper, but all of the task papers she completed in my class. - Brooksie Kluge

Joseph Bui: When the Fall semester began, Joseph was always in class, listening, turning in his homework, and taking all feedback to continuously improve his writing. However, he didn’t believe he was really a writer so much as a student of writing. As I watched his writing transform over the course of the semester from meeting standards to setting standards, it was my hope that he would see that he was, is, in fact, a writer. In his essay, “Education Means Change,” Joseph thoughtfully explores the role education plays in the familial divide in Tara Westover’s memoir, *Educated*. Near the end of the essay, Joseph argues that Westover “took what she learned and experienced in college and the times and events she spent with her professors and friends that she made to create a personality for herself and a new and better life

for her.” Like Westover, Joseph took everything he learned and experienced to create a writing identity for himself, and it was a joy to watch this identity emerge. - Amy Miller

Ashley Casper: Ashley was like a literal ray of sunshine in our class. She was always smiling, always approachable, even when she was having a bad day. She consistently worked hard and was notably kind and welcoming to those around her. Her writing always felt from the heart and from a place of exploration. - Jenny Jackson

Zailey Chambers: I recall the first time I read Zailey’s draft of “The Summer After.” I was absorbed, and I wanted more. It’s hard to read an opening that invites us to envision “that shanty house, on the street you can’t walk alone on in that city you can’t escape” and not be hooked. As I watched the essay take shape through multiple revisions, I was in awe of Zailey’s talent for crafting imagery that evokes emotion and mood, and the insight to explore how the meaning of a place changes as we grow and experience both the good and the bad life has to offer. This is a piece that will stay with me, the image of that shanty house reminding me that even through trauma, we really can grow stronger, and we don’t have to let others take our sense of safety, our sense of self, from us. - Amy Miller

Sophie Cordell: Sophie was one of the class’s hardest workers, noticeable in a class with plenty of hard workers. Often the last one to leave, Sophie always seemed to be thinking about how to be a stronger student and stronger writer. Her first paper, the essay in the publication, was memorable in how natural it sounded. It was so clearly such a significant story from her life. - Jenny Jackson

Alyssa Fanning: In her essay, “The Key to Success,” Alyssa bravely confesses that she “always wondered why we were required to read books in school,” an admission many prospective elementary teachers would probably hesitate to make, but one that I am positive many can identify with. This bravery, this willingness to be open about the fact that, all too often, education is less about engaging students and more about teachers, administrators, and school boards. In this piece, Alyssa confronts this issue head-on, claiming her own professional goal: “As a teacher, I would want to give my students a different experience than I had. I would want my students to pick out their own books and explore, as to where I was given a book and forced to read it. I would want my students to be able to find how a book that they pick has opened new doors for them.” With these words, I know that Alyssa is the sort of person I would want in my children’s classroom, the sort that understands reading is so much more than a test score or a time-filler, it is indeed a “key to success.” - Amy Miller

Tiera Fish: Tiera Fish is an amazing writer. Her words create stories that sing off the page. What makes a good writer? It is dedication, but it is also a love of the written word. As with all good writers, Tiera is a hungry reader. She reads closely and carefully, wringing delight and meaning out of each word, each page, each text she reads. And Tiera is also a mighty soul. She sees and feels what others may glide across and she brings these insights to her writing, communicating to the world the struggles many of us experience. Tiera is one of those students who is here at MWSU, doing the work, despite the challenges, despite the obstacles, despite the

heartache. She works 30-40+ hours a week to pay her way and knows the anguish of sleepless nights to get her schoolwork done. As an educator, I am humbled by how hard students like Tiera work to get their college degree. I am grateful for the care she takes in her writing and every part of her learning. She is a powerful force from which greatness will emerge. She will change her corner of the world for the better. This essay is testimony that she already has.

- Kay Siebler

Emalie Gerding: Emalie was, oftentimes, in class quiet but do not let that fool you. She is a bright young woman with many ideas and emotions swirling in her head. Over the course of the semester, I saw Emalie's writing and confidence improve. She was skilled at bringing to life her own experiences in her writing and making the reader feel as if she is part of her family, sitting in her grandmother's kitchen "covered with pistachio green cabinets and linoleum countertops," hungry for her grandmother's "world famous pancakes which were only famous in [her] family." Moreover, in her essay, "Small Town Family," the reader understands the impact that Emalie's family and the "same little town that they [her grandparents] grew up in, where my mom and aunts grew up in, and where I grew up in" had upon her. At the start of the semester, Emalie was dedicated to improving, meeting with me and revising often. However, by the end of the semester, she no longer truly needed my feedback. This is the definition of a true student, learner and writer. - Dawn Terrick

Rowan Graham: Rowan Graham would often tell me she was confused about an assignment but then pull out an outline or a rough draft that showed she understood the assignment perfectly, even though she is an outside-the-box thinker. Rowan's creativity led to her being listed twice in this year's publication, once for her essay "First Generation Students" and again for "Moving Forward," one of my favorite pieces I've ever read. In this paper, Rowan opens with the line, "I wish they made Father's Day cards for crappy dads." (Yeah, me, too.) Throughout this paper, Rowan compares her own life experiences with Tara Westover, and in particular, she focuses on their shared need to cut their toxic fathers from their lives. Rowan's writing is raw, real, and shows incredible talent. Her outside-the-box thinking is refreshing and honest and is exactly what I love to celebrate most. - Brooksie Kluge

Jordan Heard: I must admit that when Jordan first told me she was thinking of writing about a tree for her place-based writing assignment, I was curious, perhaps a bit skeptical even. I was even more so when I read in the opening lines that Jordan "had the greatest journal and best friend imaginable: the blossom tree that grew right beside our house." How could a tree function as a journal, I wondered? How can one have a relationship with a tree? How would I guide Jordan in this writing endeavor? I needn't have worried. Jordan had a vision, and that vision unfolds with a charm and sweetness in this out-of-the-box essay. When I finished reading the final draft, I knew Jordan had a talent, and I hope that one day, we will all read the story of "Kenzie and the Blossom Tree" to our children to help remind them that "Confidence is hiding within us all, but sometimes we need a little help from our friends to find it." - Amy Miller

Jay Jensik: Jay was a very thoughtful student, thoughtful in what he said, and what and how he wrote. I always looked forward to hearing his insights. Jay's essay, "Bulletproof," is an

example of a thoughtful writer as well as a powerful story of family, determination, loss and redemption. As a reader, you are taken in by his detail and vivid descriptions that move you through the comfort of his home with “the smell of BBQ chicken . . . and the Janko tree in the front would shed its leaves in the fall and it left leaf piles that we would jump through” to the jarring description of “the red from my mother’s blood that stained my shirt and the screams of my family as bullets flew through the air.” As a reader, you are also amazed by Jay’s journey from being snatched away from his home on 51st Street in Raytown by a bullet, to the “striking cold” of the hospital, to Momma Bush’s house and back to his own home. But as a teacher of writing, I am amazed how Jay was able to take all of these disparate places and bring them together, to seamlessly take us through his life and make us understand how all of these places, albeit so complex and so conflicting, connect in a way to provide meaning to him and to his readers. - Dawn Terrick

Jasmine Kennedy: Although Jasmine was always ready to see the flaws and imperfections in her work, I was immediately struck by the insight and honesty in her writing. In “Ink Splattered Across a Blank Page,” Jasmine lays bare her disbelief upon finding she had been accepted into college: “I never expected to be accepted into college. The day I got my acceptance letter, I began to cry. I was so surprised and it felt like somebody had actually wanted me. It felt like somebody thought I was smart enough and belonged in college.” Writers do this; they take risks and expose their inner lives in ways that most of us would never dare. She goes on to proclaim that she “[has] just as much of a right to be here [as] anyone else,” reminding us that to be educated is to be brave, to cast off the vision others have for us and follow our own paths. I am so glad that Jasmine’s path led her to our Missouri Western community, and to my classroom, where she truly belongs. - Amy Miller

Sisi Key: Sierra, also known as Sisi, was a memorable student from the start. A little bit quiet and a little bit reserved, Sisi stood out nonetheless because of her confident presence and her notable writing voice. As her instructor, Sisi’s writing felt earnest and authentic to me in a way that is not necessarily easy or common for a student or writer to achieve. - Jenny Jackson

Shaunte Lanham: Shaunte Lanham is a tenacious student with an undeniable passion for communicating her experiences. Throughout each stage of the course, she challenged herself to learn and apply the course material. Once Shaunte fully understood the structural components of a traditional college paper, there was no stopping her as she continued to pair her passion for communication with her developing knowledge of the essay form. I am so pleased at how hard she worked and her continued passion for her education. - Beth Reinert

Michael Lauer: Michael was very quiet in class and I think that is why his writing always surprised me – in a good way. In his Task Three essay, “Manipulation,” as well as his final exam essay, I learned how much of an impact Tara Westover’s *Educated* had upon him. In his published essay, he explores the idea of manipulation by family members and how this causes toxic relationships in families. It is a difficult subject to write about, especially if you are writing about a difficult time in your own life where your family had to face not only the loss of a loved one by cancer but also the effects of a manipulative family member. Michael writes about this

with detail and candor and is able to deftly connect his experiences with Westover's while providing the difficult conclusion that, in some cases, we must let go of family. - Dawn Terrick

Brian Mackley: Brian's papers tend to start with quotes that relate to the topic he's writing about, and the quote he opens with in his essay on standardized tests is one of my favorites, not only because it helps his main idea resonate in that particular piece, but because it defines the experience of many students who enter English 100. Brian quotes the parable of the fish being judged for climbing a tree—"if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it would live its whole life believing that it is stupid." Brian expressed a few times throughout my class that he didn't think he was too great of a writer, and that he often had to ask for help from his friends and girlfriend when writing papers. However, his papers, even in the early drafting stages, always prove otherwise, and even when he struggled, he was always eager to work hard and follow through with revisions. Brian will interrogate topics and draw connections between his experiences and what he reads, which is exactly what shines in the essay published here. He compared a textbook reading from Daniel McGinn on standardized testing and draws connections his observations, personal experience, and research he conducted on his own regarding the subject. The succinct organization, too, makes the essay a hallmark of his writing style, because his essays always loop back to his opening quote in a way that wraps the entire piece into a satisfying knot. I'm hopeful, now, that Brian no longer sees himself as a fish being asked to climb trees, and instead, realizes he was an amazing swimmer and writer all along. - Alyssa Striplin

Britny Maxwell: Britny Maxwell is a wonderful student who focuses on working hard and writing well. This piece shows that. In fact, all of her writing shows an ability that goes beyond the ordinary and touches excellence. - Dana Andrews

Tori McIntire: Tori was a very thoughtful and thought-provoking student. I could always count on her to participate in class discussion, asking meaningful questions and challenging all of our ideas. Because she is such an insightful and introspective individual, Tori can also be her own, loudest critic. She was constantly criticizing and questioning her own writing, never thinking it was good enough. In addition, she struggled with writing about her own life. However, it is this reflection that makes her the skilled and powerful writer she is. And it is no surprise that she has three essays published. In all three of her essays, she is able to provide detail that creates a sense of place which then allows us to understand her own experiences and reflections. But she then goes one step further and connects all of her reading, writing and experiences to larger issues, issues that we all need to contemplate and better understand if we are to be more humane and productive citizens. She tackles issues like gender, religion, identity and family while empowering all of us to find our own voice. In her essay, "My Ideas of Education," Tori writes, "I am no longer the person who would allow my family to be racist or sexist. I have my own views and I am learning how to express them. Westover said, "My life was narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs." Westover had to find her own force and like her, I am starting to find mine." Yes, Tori found her voice and the true meaning of being educated. I hope that this realization quiets, if just for a bit, her inner critic. - Dawn Terrick

Ben Miller: Ben Miller is a teacher's dream: hard-working, ambitious, polite, and encouraging to other students. He is the student that every other student wants in his or her small group because his comments are so positive and helpful at the same time. His bright optimism shines through in all he does, including in his publication piece, "The Day That Changed Our Families Lives Forever." In this piece, Ben grapples with the death of his 19-year-old cousin, Lacey Jo, and as part of that process, interviews family members about this event. The event is heartbreaking, yet Ben's positive spirit comes through in the closing paragraph when he reminds readers to tell their own loved ones how much they are loved. - Brooksie Kluge

Amra Muric: From the first day in class, I realized Amra was a force to be reckoned with. In class discussion as well as in her writing, she was not afraid to voice her ideas. And her ideas were always perceptive and encouraged all of us to continue the conversation. I could always count on Amra to animate our class. Fortunately, this passion and drive carried over into her writing. In her essay, "Holding on to My Loved One," she lays bare her life and soul and writes about a harrowing and life altering experience with abuse. As a result, it was a difficult essay to write for her and I commend her for writing it. I remember sitting in my office discussing and revising the paper with her as well as responding to her emails over winter break, trying to reassure her that this process would all be worth it in the end. And, in this process, I think Amra discovered what it means to be a "real" writer and what it means to write a piece of "good" text. Writers write and readers read to make sense of themselves and the world around them; to grapple with the complex issues and experiences of life; to connect to a larger world and to try to make that world better. It was worth it for everyone who read her essay. - Dawn Terrick

Saray Pilar: In "A Lost Side of Education," Saray recounts her experiences learning to read and write, experiences that left her doubting she would "ever find [her] passion for reading again." However, she takes those experiences and transforms them into hope: "In the future, I hope to introduce my kids to reading at an early age [...] I'd like to change the futures of the young minds that cross my path, whether is my baby sister or my future kids, reading will always be an important part of their lives." This hope and concern for others is genuine. Saray was always a kind and inspirational member of our classroom community, ready to encourage her peers in their writing and always ready with a friendly, welcoming smile. It comes as no surprise to me that Saray would choose to transform what was not the most positive educational experience in the past into something hopeful for the future. - Amy Miller

Shamarla Pointer: Shamarla Pointer brought with her a wealth of life experience and clear goals for her writing. As is always the case with our finest students, Shamarla came here not for a degree in and of itself, but for learning that will allow her to enrich her own and her family's lives through her new skill set. She was an absolute model student whose flair with language allowed her to bring a hospital's ER to life so vividly that even those who are spared ever seeing the inside of an ER can read Shamarla's essay and feel that they, like Shamarla, have lived it. - Bill Church

Jaylin Powell: In his essay, “Learning Stages,” Jaylin concludes with, “They [Westover, Douglass and Alexie] all looked at their position in life and wanted to change it.” Knowing Jaylin, this is also how he looks at life. He sees education as not only a way to become successful but as a way to escape the oppression and stereotypes that young African American men have faced in the past and still face today. It is this fight for equality that fuels so much of his writing and I truly hope he continues to fight and write for the “greater good.” It is what any teacher of writing hopes for her students and for the future. - Dawn Terrick

Rachel Powell: I clearly remember Rachel’s presence in the classroom from the very first day of the Fall 2019 semester. If I asked a question or opened the floor for discussion, Rachel was the first to volunteer her ideas, questions, and stories, instantly creating a feeling of sharing and community in the room. Rachel’s openness continued as each essay was submitted and Rachel shared elements of her life and a willingness to be vulnerable that all writers must have if they are to impact others. In her essay, “The Love of Learning,” Rachel again demonstrates this willingness to share her own story, to share the mistakes she made that led her away from education as well as how the foundation laid by her mother, and the responsibility of having a daughter, brought her back to a life filled with reading, writing, and learning. Rachel reminds us that “it is important to engage with our children while they are young and instill the love of reading and learning so that they can grow to enjoy it and succeed in their education.” I would add that Rachel has shown me and her classmates the value of engaging with each other in the process of reading, writing, and sharing of ourselves so that we can learn from each other. - Amy Miller

Orn-Phinyamars Seeaun: Every time I read one of Orn’s essays, I was moved whether by sadness or joy. She has the innate ability not only to express her own emotions on the page, no matter how difficult it may be, but she also has the ability to bring out emotions on the part of the reader. Whether she is writing about her grandmother’s house or the struggles she has had to overcome with her family, her voice is both tender and strong. In her final reflection for the course, Orn writes, “I would say that all of my writing assignments are my healers . . . I remembered crying over my first paper about “place” and angry over my third paper about “the abused soul,” but those were, somehow, my healing process.” This is true of her writing. It is also one of the purposes of this course. In her essay, “Bird Set Free,” she creates a beautiful analogy as she compares herself to a bird, trapped in a cage, but she claims that it is “literacy that saved my life and brought me out of that silver cage, before I died starving for food and freedom.” In this essay she not only writes about her journey to break stereotypes and attain her own kind of education but she compares her struggles and successes to the struggles and successes of Frederick Douglass and Sherman Alexie. Working with such a complex subject, connecting two different essays and authors to her own experiences and writing in a language that is not her first, native language proves that Orn is an excellent, hard-working student and skillful writer. - Dawn Terrick

Tadyn Shaffer: In his publication piece, “Masks,” Tadyn Shaffer discusses Tara Westover’s family (from the book *Educated*) and considers the loyalty we have to our own families and considers whether or not Westover’s family was a cult. In this piece, Tadyn’s

natural writing ability comes through, as it did with other papers he wrote during his semester in my course. Todyn, though often quiet in the classroom, expresses himself thoughtfully in his writing. He is a gifted writer, and I hope he continues to share his worthwhile ideas through writing. - Brooksie Kluge

Kaniesha Smith: Often times, the first essay in English 100 is truly my first introduction to a student—students are writing about significant events or people in their lives, and those moments always reveal more about who a person is and how they got to my class in the first place. Reading Kaniesha’s first essay, which is the one that appears in this book, was the opposite. In class, Kaniesha was vivacious and talkative, always chiming in during discussions and expressing her thoughts and opinions. Reading the essay, “4300 O’Bear Ave, St. Louis MO 63107,” you will discover that this was not always the case. You will see, as Kaniesha puts plain in vibrant prose, the place where she learned lessons than no child should ever have to learn. The house on O’Bear Avenue in St. Louis was a house of hardship for Kaniesha, and she details those hardships with language that is stark, but striking. And yet, despite those hardships, Kaniesha did learn, and she did overcome. The very product of that journey is here on the page, and right before your eyes if you have the pleasure to meet her in person. Instead of being introducing me to my student, the essay in these pages made me appreciate the person I had already come to know and would grow to admire. I hope, too, that as you read her essay, you can come to admire Kaniesha as both a courageous, strong woman, as well as a talented and hard-working writer. - Alyssa Striplin

Taryn Smith: Balancing work, family and school, Taryn amazed me with her dedication to this class and her writing. She sat in the front of class every day, prepared and focused regardless of what else was going on in her world. She was in class to better herself as a writer and to make a difference with her writing and education. Her essay, “Sticks and Stones,” is about how abusive acts of family can scar us. Yet, in the case of Westover and Taryn, although their scars may still be there, they are survivors who make difficult decisions in order to make better lives for themselves. Her essay, “The House on Polk Street,” is a wonderful example of her commitment to and talent for writing. “The tall, scary Grizzly Adams looking man with thick, greasy long fingered hands would pick me up and brush me off and set me back up on that bike. Grandpa would squat down to my level, proceed to chuckle and push his glasses up on his nose and turn his baseball cap from Cabela’s backward. He then would go on with, “You got tis honey? Go again!” On that sidewalk, even though you had tears welling in your eyes, the little bit of encouragement always made you forget the stinging palms and the loss of pride you just endured.” When reading this passage and Taryn’s attention to detail, character and emotion, I am reminded of the essay, “Place,” by Dorothy Allison and her advice to writers, “Place is feeling and feeling is something a character expresses . . . the smell in the air, the memory, the association. It’s all history. You are somebody real who comes from somewhere . . .” Taryn’s essay exemplifies the lessons of Allison which puts her in very good company. - Dawn Terrick

Lauren Street: In her essay, “My Inspiration,” Lauren states that her sister “Alex’s dedication and hard work has shown me that you can do anything in life if you work for it and believe in yourself.” I would add that Lauren has herself demonstrated this lesson to others.

Even with a strenuous schedule of classes, soccer practices, games, and even injury, Lauren proved to me and to her classmates the old adage “where there is a will, there is a way.” Even when faced with adversity, Lauren was never satisfied with good enough. Each essay was carefully planned, drafted, revised. Lauren asked questions when she had them, scheduled conferences, and worked through her papers until they communicated the message she was trying to send. Lauren’s example has much to teach us all about how to persevere and be the very best we are capable of being. - Amy Miller

Brittnae Tarrence: Brittnae is a good example of the kind of student teachers love to have. She never missed a class, always had her work done, and attended the CAS regularly to make sure her papers were the best possible. What is most notable is the battle Brittnae has fought throughout her life just to get to college. After losing her father at age 5, since her mother was unavailable, she lived in a foster home. At age 13 she became pregnant and gave birth to her daughter Raelyn who is now four. Finally, Brittnae and Raelyn found the perfect family who now has become her legal guardian. Her new mother now helps care for Raelyn so that Brittnae can focus on school. Brittnae is a good example of the theme of one of her published papers, making good choices. Her determination and motivation have helped her surmount obstacles that would have left many in dire circumstances. After an exceptional first semester, she is on her way to achieving her goal of becoming a nurse. - Cynthia Bartels

Kory Walts: Kory Walts showed a passion for the written word from Day One in our class. He cared how the words he put on the page represented to readers the people and events that mattered to him. Language became his conduit as he wrote, revised, and wrote again until we agreed that his word choice of precise evocative details was conveying what he wanted readers to see, hear, and feel. I'm happy to say that Kory is considering a major or minor in Creative Writing. - Bill Church