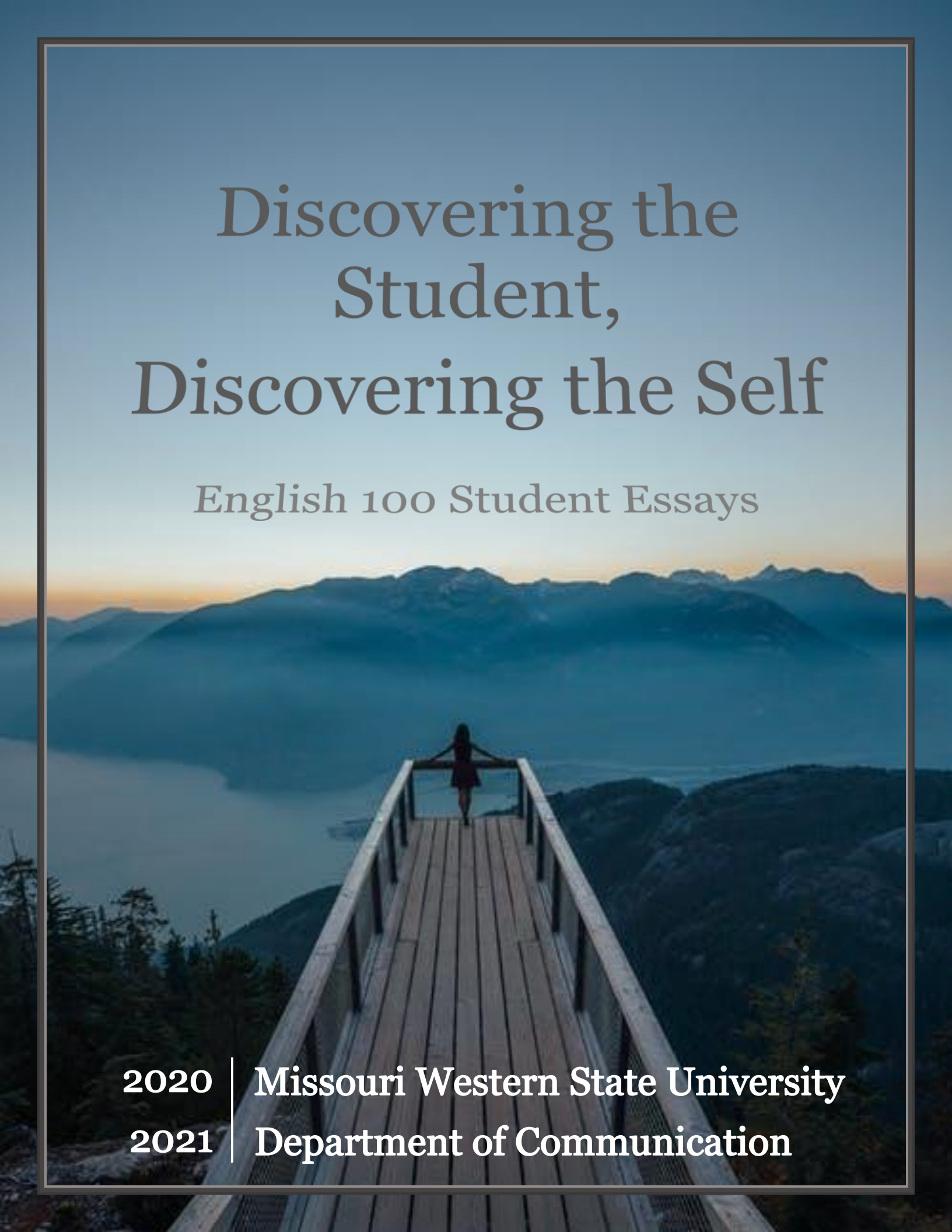


A person is standing on a long wooden bridge that stretches from the foreground into the distance. The bridge has wooden planks and railings. In the background, there is a calm lake reflecting the sky, and a range of mountains under a soft, hazy sunset sky. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Discovering the Student, Discovering the Self

English 100 Student Essays

2020 | Missouri Western State University
2021 | Department of Communication

Introduction

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

The essays that appear in this publication were selected by the English 100 Committee from submissions from English 100 students from the Spring and Fall 2020 semesters. The criteria used to evaluate and select these essays included content, originality, a sense of discovery and insight on the part of the student writer, control of form, language and sentence construction and representation of the various types of assignments students are engaged in while in this course. ENG 100, Introduction to College Writing, is a developmental composition course designed for students who show signs of needing additional work on their college-level writing before starting the regular general education composition classes. In this course, students learn about and refine their writing process with a strong focus on the act of revision, engage in critical reading, thinking and writing and write both personal and text-based essays. ENG 100 prepares students for the rigors of college-level writing and introduces them to college expectations.

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

Dawn Terrick, Director of Developmental Writing (ENG 100)
Missouri Western State University
Department of Communication
English 100 – Introduction to College Writing
2020-2021

Director of Design and Layout: Anna Handza

ENG 100 Committee:

Dawn Terrick, Director
Dana Andrews
Stacia Bensyl
Susan Garrison

Brooksie Kluge
Amy Miller
Beth Reinert
Alyssa Striplin

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR	5
LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT	6
STUDENT AWARDS	7
MOMENTS IN TIME	8
MY CHILDHOOD HOME: MYA ALLISON	9
GROWING UP WITH A SINGLE PARENT: CRISTAL ALVAREZ	14
CRASH OF GUILT: JAMES BRUNSON	17
LOCATION, SCENE, SPOT, SITE, AND SETTING: MEGAN DAHLHAUSER	20
THE RAINIER CLUB: CARLO GAMINO	27
LIFE ON THE FARM AS A COUNTRY BOY: ANDREW HERNANDEZ	31
MY SPECIAL PLACE: FAY MADISON	35
GHOSTS AND RECOVERY: JESSICA HODGES	40
OVERCOMING THE GREATEST FEAR: STEVE HOTHAM	46
UNDER THE LIGHTS: BROOKLYNN LEAL	49
A JOURNEY OF ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS: WESLEY LUETKEMEYER	53
THE JOPLIN TORNADO: HOW IT LEFT AN IMPACT: NATASHA MAYNARD	61
“HOW MY LIFE CHANGED”: ROMAN MYSCOFKSI	65
FLORIDA TRIP SUMMER TWENTY TWENTY: INTISAR NOUREIN	70
THEN & NOW: KENDRA OPOKU-BRENYAH	77
OUR PRISONS: DA'SHA ROUBIDEAUX	81
BECOMING A BETTER ME, WITHOUT YOU: TEAGHEN SCHRAUFEK-FORSHEE	86
THE CABIN: KAYLIE STAMS	91
MY DARK SCARY VOID OF DREAM: ALLOURA STEVENS	95
REMEMBERING MAMA: GRACE SZESNY	98
THE FAMILIAR UNKNOWN: ISAAC TWOMBLY	103
THE SURPRISE OF A LIFETIME: JILLIAN WITHROW	106
MY SMALL-TOWN HOME: RANDALL WOOD	110
INTERVIEW	116
GROWING UP IN A SMALL TOWN: CRISTAL ALVAREZ	117
ALCOHOLISM: SAM CERRA	120
A TRIP BACK HOME: KENDRA OPOKU-BRENYAH	124

THE FIRE: MARY FULTZ	128
THE JOPLIN TORNADO: MY MOTHER’S SIDE OF THINGS: NATASHA MAYNARD	132
HAIR STANDARDS IN AMERICA: INTISAR NOUREIN	135
SEXISM IN VIDEO GAMES: KAILEY ROADES	141
THE IMPACT OF A PARENT’S DIVORCE ON THE CHILD: TEAGHEN SCHRAUFEK-FORSHEE	145
LOVING A SOLDIER: ALLOURA STEVENS	150

IDENTITY	153
-----------------	------------

HEROES AND VILLAINS: MEGHEN DAHLHAUSER	154
UNTITLED: MORGAN HEASTAN	160
COMMUNICATION VS. EXCOMMUNICATION: JESSICA HODGES	164
OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: MADELINE KOCHENDERFER	170
DO WE REALLY KNOW OUR FAMILY LIKE WE THINK WE DO?: KATELYN KOEHLER	174
THE GOD’S EYE: NICOLE KRZYZANIAK	180
ABUSE: BROOKLYNN LEAL	185
MENTAL ILLNESS: THE REAL STORY: CADEN ROMER	190
FAMILIES AREN’T FOR EVERYONE: TEAGHEN SCHRAUFEK-FORSHEE	196
RESTRAINTS: ALLOURA STEVENS	200
THE DEVIL INSIDE: RANDALL WOOD	203

EDUCATION AND LITERACY	210
-------------------------------	------------

FIGHTING DEMONS: MEGAN DAHLHAUSER	211
WHY NOT ME?: CARLO GAMINO	217
LITERACY AUTOBIOGRAPHY: BLAKE GOFORTH	221
WORD VOMIT AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS: JESSICA HODGES	227
HARD WORK PAYS OFF: KATELYN KOEHLER	233
THE JOURNEY: NICOLE KRYZYANIAK	241
YOUR OWN PERSONAL FIGHT: BROOKLYNN LEAL	246
BEING EDUCATED GOT ME TO DREAM BIG: CIERRA PITTS	251
NEVER STOP LEARNING: RANDALL WOOD	258

Letter from the Director

This edition of *Discovering the Student, Discovering the Self*, marks our 15th anniversary. And although I was hoping to mark this anniversary with much fanfare, our celebration will look different this year due to the ongoing pandemic. However, that does not mean we do not have a lot to celebrate. Because of the added challenges of last semester, I want to commend our students' achievement by acknowledging their perseverance and courage to share their work and experiences with our audience.

On August 18, 2020, students expected to be sitting in a classroom with their peers, hanging out in their dorms, and making new friends -- all unhindered. However, for many students, their reality was being distanced from their peers and instructors, wearing masks. For other students, their reality was sitting in their dorm room, in their pajamas, with their laptop, for their ENG 100 class. The change in physical space along with other obstacles made this semester unlike any other, even for someone like me who has been teaching at Western for 23 years. Like my students, I was nervous. It troubled me that my students were missing out on a wholly immersive college experience for the social aspect of college can be just as important as the academic aspect in many ways. For students, struggles were more pronounced and for some students insurmountable. But this publication is proof that students were able to persevere, to not only survive but thrive. I always tell my students that education should be uncomfortable. And it was this semester. But it was also beautiful and empowering. The resilience and perseverance I found in my ENG 100 students was inspiring.

Every year, every edition of *Discovering the Student, Discovering the Self* is meaningful and is defined by certain events. This year, perhaps more than even before, students were forced to dig deeper, confront unique obstacles and reveal their strength to truly discover who they are. As I read the essays in this edition, I am reminded of so much of what students and I read in Tara Westover's memoir *Educated*. Just like *Educated*, our ENG 100 students' words and stories reveal both pain and joy, loss and empowerment, tragedy and victory as well as the cathartic nature of writing and reading. The ENG 100 Committee and I believe this publication represents hope in a time when many of us may feel hopeless and helpless. For those of you who made it through the semester and whose work is honored here, you provide hope to each other, to your instructors and to those students who did not make it last semester but who will return and find success.

This is the power of the written word and of this year's publication.

Sincerely,

Dawn Terrick

Letter from the President

Dr. Elizabeth Kennedy

Strength. Endurance. Resiliency. Grit. Grind. No other option; no looking back. Forward is farther, and further yet.

The above represents my mantra which forms that slice of my identity as a runner. Not as an athlete, mind you, but as a runner. Self-deprecatingly, I tell anyone who asks why, that I run because it's the only sport I'm coordinated enough to do. I've been running with such regularity over so many years that my relationship to this one sport is undeniably monogamous. Recently, however, I've taken a fall or two (admittedly, and with limited shame, due to tripping on my part), so not only do I now have to hedge a bit more on my level of physical coordination, but I also have had to come to terms with the fact that my healing time has put more space between my training days. Sigh.

But, I can run. And for some reason known only to the running gods, I can run far. I've got the medals (aka, my prized bling) and the t-shirts to prove it. I've run 15 marathons, including the Boston Marathon twice, and have even won a marathon.....wait for it..... in my age group and for which I was bestowed with a prize! (Seriously – a prize!) I've run dozens of other races, including multiple half marathons, 10 milers, 10ks, 5Ks. I'm so excited to have signed up for several local Saint Joseph races for the 2021 spring – summer season (COVID-19-safe of course) that I'm unrestrainedly giddy with anticipation; I just can't wait to race.

Be that as it may and regardless of the distance I might be training for, I am always careful to loop my mantra in as I log the miles. I pound the pavement to create cadence with the words.

Strength. Endurance. Resiliency. Grit. Grind. No other option; no looking back. Forward is farther, and further yet.

There are times in our lives, many times, when our ability to withstand that which we think we cannot, is tested, when what we are confronted with is, by all appearances, an unbreachable distance that we must somehow, somehow, find a way to cross. To take that first step, and then another, and then one more and then another and another until we realize that we can traverse the landscape challenge facing us and that we may potentially or even eventually will grow to appreciate the journey process, is the essence of Perseverance.

Perseverance gets you to the end; it gets you to done. Find your own tempo, inscribe your own mantra, make sure your footfalls step to it. Believe in your skills and abilities with a conviction that makes small all the troubling insecurities and paralyzing self-doubts that trip up true valuation of how fast and how far you can go. Focus on your essence, and take strength in what makes you unique and valuable. And most importantly, know that those talents will cross you over the finish line.

Student Awards

Never stop fighting until you arrive at your destined place - that is, the unique you. Have an aim in life, continuously acquire knowledge, work hard, and have perseverance to realise the great life.

A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

Life is not easy for any of us. But what of that? We must have perseverance and above all confidence in ourselves. We must believe that we are gifted for something and that this thing must be attained.

Marie Curie

Award Winners for the 2021 edition of *Discovering the Student, Discovering the Self*:

Top Award Winner

Megan Dahlhauser:

"Location, Scene, Spot, Site, and Setting" and "Fighting Demons"

Other Winners

Katelyn Koehler: "Do We Really Know Our Family Like We Think We Do?"

Brooklynn Leal: "Abuse"

Intisar Nouredin: "Hair Standards in America"

Special Thanks to the contributors of the Student Award Fund:

Stacia Bensyl

Shawna Harris

Brooksie Kluge

Susan Martens

Amy Miller

Dawn Terrick

Mei Zhang

A conceptual image showing a hand holding a glass jar. Inside the jar is a miniature, colorful representation of a galaxy, with bright orange and red nebulae against a dark blue background. The jar is held up against a vast, deep blue night sky filled with stars and the Milky Way galaxy, which is visible as a bright, hazy band of light stretching across the upper half of the frame. The overall mood is contemplative and cosmic.

Moments in Time

My Childhood Home

Mya Allison

As I push through all the twigs and poison ivy, I reach the hidden spot in my backyard, my escape from reality. I would sit back there for hours digging holes and messing with the slimy worms. I would take all my friends back there and we would just scream in delight because that's what kids did. We played till the daylight soon went away. All that was left was the darkness. We would all run back inside sleep then do it all the next day. My childhood home has so many memories attached to it. It wasn't in the best area. There were always cops coming down the road and there was a ton of gang and drug activity. So now that I look back on it it was a good decision to leave the area. We now live in a nice neighborhood that doesn't have this activity. I'm glad we left when we did because I wouldn't have gotten the opportunities I have now.

Ever since I could remember my house was honestly the nicest house on the street. My house sat on a dead end street and the houses surrounding it were all low income houses. My house was a bright red brick and was only one story. In the house there were 3 bedrooms, 1 bathroom and a living room.

My brother and I were right by each other, we could talk to each other through the walls. We giggled at night as we communicated till our parents would rush to our rooms telling us to quiet down .

When that would happen our stomachs would drop and a rush of fear would run through our blood as we scurried to bed. My brother and I were fairly close as kids, we were always up to something mischievous, whether it was talking through the walls or doing things we weren't supposed to do outside, such as whipping sticks and rocks at

each other. Eventually one of us would get nailed and we would have to practically beg for the other one not to tell mom.

My bed room was my safe haven; it was small but I made it work. I had a T.V., my bed, and a ton of toys. I spent most of my days in my bedroom and if I wasn't in my bedroom I was in my backyard. If I was having a bad day I'd go into my room and spend my whole day there. My bad days consisted of either mom yelling at me or I was having a rough time in school. It was mainly the first one. My mom still to this day gets so frustrated with me and I'm scared of her. Even at my new house my room is where I spent most of my days to avoid conflict. If I were having one of these days I would sit on my laptop and watch a ton of different youtubers. Over the summer this year I never left my room, I never wanted to hangout with anyone or even get up to go eat. I felt as if I had everything I needed in my room, I stayed on the phone 24/7 and it was affecting my health. This past summer I dropped nearly 20 pounds due to my "safe haven". I did the exact same thing in my old home. My room might have been my "safe haven" but it was changing me as a person.

Our living room was where we had all of our rough discussions, such as family passing away or that one of our animals was sick. It was mainly my dad, my mom would never break the news. On a particular day I came home from school and my dad told me to come into the living room. I had a bad feeling that someone passed. As my dad stared at my brother and I, tears came into his eyes. This is the only time I've ever seen my father cry besides me leaving for college. He states that his mother had passed away, My grandma, one of my closest friends. My grandma was one of my main relationships in my family. I would have sleepovers with her and cook together and share so many stories with each other. I couldn't believe this was happening to me, I didn't believe it

was happening I didn't want to believe him. After a couple minutes I came to the realization that I lost one of my best friends. I started bawling on the couch and stormed off to my room, crying the night away not being able to fully recover from this great loss.

Out of all the years I've been at the house, 16 to be exact, there were only a few spots that made me extremely happy. They made me happy because I could get away from the harsh cruel world and all the bad activity going on my street. Those were the secret spots in the woods and my front yard. The woods had twigs and falling branches all over it; it was pretty dangerous. I found old car batteries back there frequently. The whole neighborhood would all gather in that little spot and have Pokemon battles and trade cards. Excitement would rush upon our faces as we would get the card we'd been dreaming for. My front yard was very important because that's where my dad would meet me everyday after school, I would get so excited to see him and would basically run home because he was my best friend and still is. He would sit on the porch and just wait. I also would lay in the front yard at night and stargaze looking at all the different stars wondering if they were angels in the sky. I would talk to my grandpa thinking he was a star and I would do that for about an hour. I felt safe and happy when I was there.

About 3 years ago my family decided to move. I was truly devastated because that was my home. I've never lived anywhere else in my life and I didn't want to. My parents were telling me how the house wasn't in a good area anymore and it was time to go and we needed a bigger house anyways. I would cry at night looking around at the house just wishing we didn't have to move. In my 16 year old head, I was thinking I would never make any good memories again because I didn't live in the house. Then came the moving day. I packed every box slowly and once I put the last one in, I walked around one last time saying goodbye to everything. I placed my hand on the tree where my

second hamster was buried, feeling the bark made me even more sad because I remember running around those trees playing tag with my neighbors. As we drove away I took one last look at the home I spent 16 years in and I was devastated.

At the new house I flourished. I was so much happier, it was a much nicer neighborhood, and I could have my friend over all the time since they lived down the street. The house was super nice. It has 4 bedrooms and 2 baths with a bunch of other rooms in it. It is also one story but it doesn't feel like it with all the rooms. Each room was a basic color, grey or a light brown. The only thing exciting on the wall were the posters and family portraits that surrounded the dull walls. When you look out the window you see the sore thumb of the street, a bright orange house with stuff everywhere in their yard. In my new house there are a ton of windows and more color. We have a ton of plants outside which bring hummingbirds by. My new house is in a great neighborhood with no crime in it. I am happier there and I'm glad we made the move because it made me a better person. Since the move my whole aspect of life has changed. I now realized that the area I grew up in was no longer safe and secure. This is because the old neighborhood itself was going down the drain. My neighbors frequently sold drugs and there was gang activity in the area. There were a ton of fights and there were gunshots. As a kid growing up this is extremely scary. It got to the point where it was enough and my parents wanted to move. Once we did we go back sometimes to see how it is and the neighborhood is worse now and isn't how it used to be. It makes me sad and breaks my heart that my childhood home became a place of gang activity and drugs.

My childhood home will forever remain embedded in my brain but once I look back at it, the situation was not good due to the surrounding area. I'm glad we made it

out of there because I wouldn't have the opportunities I have now. I would not be as happy as I am now if it wasn't for the move because it was a real eye opener on the community. A month after we left I really realized that my new home is safe and is in a good area. It's sad I'll never get to go back into the woods or walk up my front lawn to see my dad. But in my new house, even at 18, I still walk up the front lawn to meet my dad there. My childhood home is significant to me because it created who I am today. If we moved to the house I'm in now, way back when, I wouldn't have the experience I encountered as I was growing up.

Growing up with a Single Parent

Cristal Alvarez

Challenges, opportunities, and exceptional hardships make me think about many things that I have happened throughout my 19 years of life. However, my biggest challenge has been growing up with a single parent. Growing up with a single parent is special, but it's not easy. I learned that a single parent would do whatever it takes to make you happy and give you the best life possible. It can be stressful and difficult.

When I think of who I am and my background as a whole, I instantly think of growing up in my home. I grew up in a single mother, who I am most grateful for, has taught me many things. Although this is one of my biggest challenges, I may have had to face while growing up. Watching my hard-working mother at an early age, I knew I wanted to be successful, and it would have to be something I have to work hard to reach my goal, but this would be necessary to grow into who I am and my motivator growing up. For me, the mother has always been an important work ethic. At an early age, I learned to work for what I want; as I grew up, I watched my mom still struggle to raise four kids independently. I've seen her struggle to make ends. I rarely could go to movie theaters with my friends or get new clothes every school year. My mom has always had to stretch a small income across bills, rent, and our family's needs. I remember worrying about whether or not her income would be enough to push too far for one month. Because of this, at 16, I began my first part-time job. I took on this job to help with my increasing wants as a teenager.

My first job was at The Lenox Care Center. As a Dietary Aide, I was in charge of setting up the tables, making their drinks, and serving the meals. I would set the tables

differently depending on who sat there. My favorite person at the nursing home would always tell me how proud she of me. She would thank me for setting up her table just the way she liked it, feeding her, coloring with her, or for only just talking to her. Even though it was hard balancing school and my career, I kept working because I knew it would stress my mother's shoulders. Through this, I learned to appreciate every dollar but that my work ethic would get me far. I have had to see this made me realize if I want to reach my goals, it has to be done with a structure of putting your mind to it, balance, and perseverance. My mother's outstanding balance taught me the importance of responsibility skills as a teenager to balance my academic work, cheer, and job. She has overall shaped my work ethic and perspectives to work hard for what I want. Her values have always inspired me to set and achieve my goals with balance and hard work.

My mom's support system gives me the courage to go after my dreams and try harder to better myself, whether in the workplace or school. Being raised by my single mother has been such an essential to my identity because my mom has always shown me be that dedication, hard work, and independence are what it takes to be a strong person like my mom. These attributes are what I hope to strive for with things I may face along my journey in life. The strong relationship I have built with my mother has helped me become who I am. Having a women's opinion and influence, I've become strong-minded and determined to go after what I want without relying on others. Growing up with a strong woman as my role model has influenced me to recognize feminism because of her strong qualities. Not having my father around was very hard for me. For a long time, I was hurt and didn't know how to cope with it. I would refuse to talk to him growing up because I blamed him for the hardships we were going through. I would often hear my mom crying in the room because she didn't have more food and

bills. Growing up, I knew I didn't want to continue to struggle as much as I did when I was little.

In conclusion, growing up with a single parent has been challenging but has shaped me to be the person I am today. Growing up with a single mom has taught me to work hard for what I want and appreciate everything my mom has done for me.

Crash of Guilt

James Brunson

One traumatic experience in my life that shaped me today was a car accident that happened to my brother. Due to this experience my brother and I relationship has changed for the good. Through being blamed for the accident, to helping my brother through his recovery and feeling guilty, and for having my parents be more concerned about me and my driving and everyone being worried that night. But this experience has changed me overall for the greater good. This experience has also changed some relationships.

I remember me and my brother pulling up the drive away in front of our house. My brother asks me for the keys so he could go to football practice. I thought about it for a while because I was told not to give him the keys but I was only trying to be a good sibling when I tossed him the keys. A few hours later I got a phone call from my brother's best friend telling me my brother got in a car accident, my first instinct was anger cause I thought he just hit a car and it just had some dents and scrapes. When I got to the location of the car accident all I saw was the flash of police and ambulance lights and the glimmer of tiny glass shards scattered across the ground like a thin coat of snow. As I walk closer I see the car is upside down and the front half of the car is missing, As me and my father walk toward the ambulance we are stopped by the paramedic and told to follow the ambulance to the nearest hospital.

As we enter the hospital we call our intermediate family to meet us at the hospital, Once everyone is there we all discuss what happened and toward the end it feels like all the blame is being directed toward me. As me and my family are sitting in

the waiting room of the hospital's emergency room my older brother said to me that I am to blame for my brother's car accident. He also says to me that whatever my brother does I also have to take blame for it. My family watches as me and my older brother go back and forth for a while until my Aunt says that it wasn't fault and my brother is in the wrong for saying that. My brother putting me at blame kind of placed that mind set in my head that maybe I really am to blame.

After my brother was released from the hospital he couldn't do a lot of stuff the average person could do. So I was the one helping him during his recovery, And it was mostly because I saw that this accident was taking a toll on my parents and I somewhat felt guilty and the cause of everything. After being in the hospital for quite a while my brother's arm was at a 90 degree angle for about 2 or 3 months and when they finally took the cast off we all noticed he couldn't really move his arm from that position. My brother described it as feeling like pins and needles all the time and was super stiff and would hurt him if his arm didn't have any support. He couldn't do a lot of things because of this and I had to do basically everything for him, I had to help him with eating, sitting up, and hygiene stuff. All while doing this I still felt like I was to blame, But one good thing came from this that strengthened our relationship. He apologized for all the bad he's done to me throughout our childhood.

After the car accident and through the recovery process I noticed that my parents became very timid when it came to staying, such as me driving and what my brother does. My parents decided it was only right to get me a new car cause my brother wrecked mine. They were kind of skeptical about giving it to me. But, I also notice in myself that I get kind of anxious when it comes to car accidents and being close to having one. My parents wouldn't usually care when it came to me driving but that all

changed after that day. They still ask me if I am driving safely or if I'm doing the right thing on the road. Them doing that made me feel smothered but also kind of worried about what's going through their minds. That day also made me kind of anxious when it comes to driving especially when it comes to car accidents. I honestly think I'm definitely scared of being in a car accident. So I changed my driving so I could never put myself in that position of being in one.

From having been put in charge, to having helped my brother recover, and having noticed the concern of my parents this traumatic car accident has overall changed me. It's changed relationships between both of my brothers, how I drive, and how my parents act towards driving. But, lucky this experience has changed me for the best. It could have gone way worse than what the outcome was.

Location, Scene, Spot, Site, and Setting

Megan Dahlhauser

I've never had a home. I've often wondered what it would be like, but I've never been able to fully grasp the concept of it. The physical sense is easy, most people associate four walls and a roof with their home. What alludes me is the emotions, the mentality, of having somewhere so special, so near and dear to the heart that you feel safe and happy. I grew up amidst chaos and instability. While at times we had our four walls and a roof, there were many times we did not. We moved around so much, the only walls I had to rely on were the ones I built up around myself. There was no comfort or safe place which left me no choice but to become as independent and resilient. I am thankful for that.

Life is a struggle. Struggle isn't bad, but it is unpredictable. There are twists and turns we never see coming and though some of us may travel down the same path, I have learned none of us leave the same footprints in our wake. It's crazy to think about now, looking back, on how hard it is to do the simplest of things. Like eat. Poverty is not an issue unique to myself, but one that affects millions around the world. We all need to do it and yet not everyone can. Food is money and money is not something we had. Stay warm in winter and cool in summer, lights on when it gets dark, those were things we weren't able to do. Electricity isn't a right, it is a privilege. Warm water for baths? Cold works just as good if we had running water at all.

It didn't take me long to realize how unusual my circumstances were. If I said something in passing to the reality I lived in at school, teachers would call my parents in for a meeting or sometimes, call strangers in to evaluate my family. I would get in

trouble, a lesson I learned quickly was that no one outside of our family should ever know anything about our family. School was not a safe place, if anything, it was a danger to what little of stability we had. We didn't have much but at least we had each other. Our business was our business. No friends could come over, because they would see the house a mess. I couldn't go over to any friend's house, for I might see it clean and ask questions. We became distant to relatives for even they, though family, weren't family enough to know.

Where we lived didn't matter. Every place, no matter how different on the outside, the inside was always the same. I can say the place I grew up was in a little motel room with four people squished into it. We shared a bed and fought over the worn down pillows with suspicious looking stains. When we were bad, we slept on the floor. I can tell you the moldy, musty smell wafting from the heavily used carpets is enough to make you feel sick, though the sheets were sometimes no better. I remember one night as I lay on the floor, dragging my nail tip across the ground I wondered why every single motel had blueish gray floors, as if that color magically hid the years of dirt tracked and stomped into the fibers. For whatever reason, that moment in time is burned into my brain. The bare walls echoed the neighboring room at night. As a kid I didn't think much of the odd noises, though sounds of anger and ecstasy can be somewhat unsettling no matter the age.

No matter how unsettling some things about the motels might have been, I look at them with fond memories. At the very least, my family was together. I didn't realize at the time but now looking back, I see how important those motel moments were to me. We didn't have anything to our name, all we had fit into a suitcase so that when my family inevitably fell behind on the bill we could move quickly to the next place.

Priorities matter and as long as you have what you need, you can keep fighting. Those shabby rooms for rent really taught me how little value there is in the material things, how little we actually need to survive. I remember another night, when I was nine, my parents sat me on the bed. Christmas was coming but the year had been particularly hard, so my parents weren't able to scratch up any change for any gifts to keep the charade of Santa Clause alive. My parents were there, telling me they didn't want me to think I was a bad kid when I didn't get anything, so they had to be the ones to tell me he wasn't real. I sobbed, hysterically, not because I lost belief in the magic or because I wasn't getting presents, I cried because I had trusted them and they lied.

I could also say that I grew up on a farm. I could describe the earthy, muddy smell of the fields after a heavy rain or the powerful stench of the cow manure. I could tell you about the dust storms caused by a rusty tractor, whirling hay particles through the air like a miniature tornado. Even to this day as I pass a field, I can tell you what was planted just by the space between the crop rows. Spending time before dawn until well past dusk in a combine day after day gave you the best bird eye view fields.

My favorite farmhouse we lived in was a little white shack in the heart of bluegrass Kentucky. I can remember that the school bus would pull over just off the highway where our cobble and dirt road intersected. It was a long mile walk after that down to our zigzagging driveway, surrounded by trees up until you reached the house and then behind it was nothing but cornfield which I found creepy. I had a bird, a little finch I believe, that got sick and died. My father took me out to the cornfield and told me the bird was going to fly to Heaven and chucked it through the air. It was a strange moment when gravity took the bird from the sky and it fell out of my view behind the

stalks. I was simply confused, too young to really know anything about death and seeing my bewilderment, I remember my dad giving a nervous laugh.

While living on the farm, I used to hate the walk to and from the bus stop, in the summer cicadas would be so loud you could feel the vibrations of their buzzing in your chest. They always freaked me out, leaving their dead, dry husks everywhere. If you continued down the road, past our house, you would come to the old Amish barn, falling to bits and pieces. Vultures would perch at the top, scanning the pasture that was nestled behind the barn. The cows out at the barn were always friendly, we even named one special Jersey cow Max because she had the personality of a classic pet dog. Every day I would go out to see Max, scratch her giant forehead and give her a kiss on her big, wet nose. She would lick the salt off my hands in return. Despite the many things that I didn't like, I enjoyed the farm, I enjoyed the peace and quiet being around the wilderness of the outdoors.

It was here I think I really started to set off on my own and picked up the dangerous habit of wandering off by myself. A habit that would get me in unfortunate situations later on. If I wasn't out in the pasture with the cows, I would be in the corn field, pretending it was a Halloween maze but genuinely getting lost in it. I think I developed this habit because while the land the house sat on was good to me, the house itself was bad. It was an average, small old place. The only unique thing about the interior was that the second bedroom had an add-on or some sort of remodel, which left this space in between two walls and a window on the inside that let you look into the little closet like room. The second I saw the weird nook it scared me. Something about the dark, small space with a window just didn't feel right, it made my stomach churn. It was an entirely different type of unease and there are times I still have nightmares about

being stuck within the walls of the house. In my sleep I hear my mother threaten, “Do you want to go in the wall? Well, then...” she would say. It was a punishment for being bad. The only problem is I always seemed to do something she didn’t like. Between the walls and the countryside, I got used to being on my own. At times I felt isolated but that wasn’t always a bad thing when at times I wanted to just be left alone. It was here my independence really grew and like my nightmares when I’m trapped between the walls of that house, I started to become trapped within the walls inside my mind.

Perhaps, though, I should tell you about the low-income suburbia we frequented. I remember my brother and I would have to be back home before the street lights even turned on, my parents didn’t trust our neighborhood. I remember the nights I would linger, waiting for as close to dark as I could. I heard fireworks all the time but never saw them and blamed that on my parents making me come home so early. They would be furious when I wasn’t home on time. I didn’t realize until later it was never fireworks that I was hearing. It wasn’t until I saw it in person, I really learned what it was.

My favorite place in the suburbs we lived was a red brick apartment complex. There were other kids that lived there so we always had friends to play with. Their families didn’t have much money either so we would play with sticks and dirt since we learned the hard way it wasn’t a good idea to play dodgeball with rocks. I liked the apartments so much, the friends I made there, I started keeping a piggy-bank. I thought that if I saved pennies and dimes, it would help the bills and we wouldn’t have to move. Whenever my parents started arguing about money or we stopped having dinner or hot water, I would bring them my stash and offer it as if the five or ten dollars I would be lucky if I collected was lottery worthy. Instead, it bought another pack of cigarettes for my dad or something for my mom to drink away.

I've lived in so many places, I couldn't count if I tried. I try to think of the lessons I learned from each and every place. What did the motels teach me? The farm? How about the apartments, duplexes, studios, or houses? I learned so many things, I have memories of so many places, and yet I feel nothing when I think of them. Even if at the time I liked the place or was afraid of it, I can think of a dozen other places we lived that made me feel the same. I have been homeless, I have been placeless, and even that was recurring to the point it was more of a mild inconvenience than a life altering event.

I've never had a home. I've never had a place bring me a sense of safety. I look at places and that is all I see. A place. A site. A spot. A location. I see people on their porches, children playing in the yard, and I can't help but feel green with envy. Even if I bought a house today, I doubt it would be enough to make me feel like they feel. I hear people talk about their family, see the love in their eyes, and I can't help but feel bitter towards mine. Not for their struggles, for their actions. For the yelling, the neglect, for the violence, and abuse that I kept quiet about my whole life. It's not just places that have lost their meaning to me, but people, too. A home. A family. Friends. These are things I learned to live without. That was the hardest lesson for me to learn, that for now, I don't have a place where I belong.

While my family and the places we lived taught me many bad things, I learned from their mistakes. I saw their struggle and I saw how much they fought just to survive and provide. I learned from them the brilliance of resilience. I learned how to be independent, whether I wanted to be or not, I was made to understand the value of being able to be alone. I learned how to get what I want in life, to manage money, to be responsible in ways my parents failed to be. Yet, I also learned how life's not fair. I learned how even if you struggle and fight, you won't always win. I learned that no

matter how hard you try, sometimes, it isn't enough. I learned lessons I didn't want to learn, lessons I needed to learn, and every day, I try to learn something new from every place I pass through.

The Rainier Club

Carlo Gamino

The Rainier Club is an important symbol to Seattle's identity, and even more important to mine. The prideful members and its employees played a pivotal role in my professional life, and the values I learned from the club directed my life to a different pathway than I could have ever imagined. I didn't know this at the time, but I learned at the Rainier Club everything I needed to combat the obstacles that lay ahead. The next few pages will tell a story about an insecure young man wanting more, and a building that's responsible for that drive.

I'm on a crowded bus on 2nd and Cherry — about a 5 minute walk to my beloved Rainier Club. The last 40 minutes have included myself standing up and offering my seat to an elderly lady as I slowly sip on my piping hot coffee, shuffling through songs, preparing for a 14 hour shift. Like any big city, Seattle is full of prideful people that are ambitious, confident, and gritty. There's this energy that radiates across the city. I gather my thoughts and calm myself. As I get off the bus, you feel the energy in the air — that feeling that everyone in Seattle is willing and ready to endure a long day of work. As the crosswalk turns green, everyone walks with their headphones on and most of the established individuals have a nice formal topcoat looking sharp, without a hint of grogginess in their face. As I walk up the Seattle hills, I see skyscrapers that look like they're piercing the clouds, the iconic Space Needle in the distance, but what stands out is the Iconic 66,000 square foot brick building right in the heart of 4th avenue. I walk into this building proud to be one their six janitors.

The Club gives off an elitist vibe with their strict dress-code, Michelin Star trained chefs', and a membership process that is arbitrary; usually only seeking Seattle's elite citizens. The club is known to host private performances for wealthy Venture Capitalists that include the likes of: Paul McCartney, and Beyonce. Major acquisitions of companies like Microsoft; And the founder of Starbucks even sold the Seattle Supersonics at the club. On any given day, you may run into Russell Wilson and his wife Ciara having brunch; make eye contact with Jeff Bezos as he heads to the library; or even be in the same elevator with Bill Gates — as he tells you his strategy for his weekly game of bridge.

This glamorous life-style is a polar opposite from mine. Both my parents are immigrants of Mexico: my father from Tijuana — and my mother from an unincorporated town 33 miles south of Puerto Vallarta. My father became a mechanic, and my mother works as a translator for the state of Washington's Department of Labor and Industries. I grew up blue-collar. And, to be honest, it has plenty of positive benefits. My father is able to attend every football practice in the fall, and during the winter he is even able to help out with the basketball team. My mother gets off at a reasonable hour, and gets weekends off to watch over us and our guests. The only drawback in my upbringing is that as a first generation college student, It's difficult to envision yourself as something other than a blue-collar worker. Growing up, there were no Doctors, Lawyers, or Professors that I could go to and ask questions about how I could possibly become them one day.

The janitorial and service staff I teamed up with at the club influenced my work ethic and my desire to pursue other endeavors in my life — without any fear of failure. With Seattle being a sanctuary city, the majority of the service staff in the hospitality industry across the west-coast boasts a large group of Illegal immigrants — typically

from Mexico. Speaking with my colleagues, hearing their stories about the dreams they had when they took the dangerous voyage to the states started putting thoughts into my head about the responsibility I have to pursue an education. The first few months of working with my hispanic colleagues, I came out with the impression that I would remain at the club for as long as they had, and I loved that idea. I absorbed all of their characteristics. The hard work, without knowing with complete certainty what the future holds; their perseverance during difficult times at work, knowing there was no going back. I envisioned myself ten years down the road with the same staff reminiscing about the old days — but content that we had job security and stayed loyal to the club. The service staff, however, had a different outlook on the future for me. They consistently asked me if I had any desire to attend college. I told them that I haven't, and was honest that I struggled for the majority of my high school days, and the prospect of attending college frightened me. What encouraged me was their persistence and polite questioning — wondering why I should doubt myself, if they haven't?

After a year of working at the club I felt more confident in pursuing a college life. Certainly the hospitality industry isn't a prerequisite for success in college. But I felt that the rigorous hours and attention to detail setting up events for hundreds of people taught me to compartmentalize my time, and come prepared. Although I didn't outwardly seek a mentor, I got the best possible one by luck. It just so happened that I had lunch every single day with Amy Boyd, the Director of Communications at the Rainier Club. At this time, I had already committed to Missouri Western, and I opened up to her about my anxiety in regard to starting school. Doubts clouded my mind: Will I ever succeed? What about my past struggles with school? Amy was kind enough to give me thoughtful insight on the amount of time needed to study for each class, and even

gave me her contact information so I could reach out to her if I ever needed to chat. Amy didn't say it directly, but I felt that she believed in me — and I wanted to make her and the service staff proud.

Although my time at Missouri Western hasn't been perfect, and I still have doubts and insecurities about the upcoming years, I feel poised that if I put in the time and effort — the results will follow. My goal this year is to translate the excellent professional traits to my studies, and follow the advice given to me by my colleagues. If all else fails, I'll close my eyes and imagine myself on that crowded bus on 2nd and Cherry.

Life On The Farm As A Country Boy

Andrew Hernandez

I grew up with parents that grew up on a farm just like me. Being able to wake up listening to the birds chirping and seeing the sun come up is the best way to start a morning. Oh and I forgot a cup of coffee! Being out in mother nature is a dream come true. As I drive down the gravel road and watch the big dust clouds roll out from the bottom of my truck it looks like a big cloud behind me. Farm life can be very challenging to young kids and adults. Being able to keep up with your animals and family can be very difficult. I have grown up on a farm and have loved it. Whether it was being in the barn, getting the cows in the pin, or out in the woods hunting, this farm will always be my safe place to go.

Beep.... Beep.... Beep... I roll over in bed as the sound of my alarm clock goes off. I could hear my dad walking on our squeaky wooden floor as he came into my room. My dad comes in yelling, "Andrew wake up it's time to get started!" I was late getting out of bed to get the cows pinned up in a different part of the farm. Dad was not happy with me. Today was going to be a long day of him being pissy. Dad and I normally get along, but not today. Today was a day I will have to face adversity. I got up with the smell of fresh bread out of the toaster with butter melting on it. I could hear dad's frustration in his voice as he is still yelling at me for being up late. I told him I was fine and that it won't take long for me to eat. I hurried up and ate food and out the door we went. The sun is just about to come up as you can smell the fresh cut grass and the leaves hitting up against each other. Mom leaned up against the old truck messing with the flowers planted by it. Me and dad are headed to herd the cattle and get them in a different pin. I

went to grab the truck with hay on the back to get them to follow me to the new spot. The sky had an overcast and looked like it was about to rain on us. The ground was already wet and mushy from the rain yesterday. I didn't know if I could make it across the pasture without getting stuck. With that being said I couldn't make it. My father was so pissed off that his face was red and I could see his veins in his neck. He started yelling at me. Spit flying out of his mouth as he takes his anger out on me. We got the truck out of the wet slushy spot of the field and got the cows moved into their new territory. We left a big mud hole in the pasture that you could swim in. Dad came up to me slipping in the wet grass and apologized to me. I started to walk back up towards the house when dad asked if I wanted to go hunting in the morning. This put a big smile on my face as I said yes.

Growing up in the country you have to love to hunt because this is how you get free food and also it keeps the deer population down. It is also special for my dad and me. My hunting clothes smell like a bag full of leaves. I woke up at four thirty in the morning. I got the coffee brewing and the oven up to three hundred and fifty degrees to get my cinnamon rolls cooked. The smell of coffee was lingering throughout the house. I could smell the cinnamon rolls while sitting outside in my old wooden rocking chair. As I am sitting in my squeaky rocking chair I would watch the hummingbirds land right in front of me on the feeder as they chase each other around the house. We finally got our breakfast and headed out the door. I parked the truck up on this big hay field that had coons scrambling around trying to get away from the truck. Looking across the field I would watch the top of the hay going back and forth in the way of the wind like they were all dancing together. We made it to the tree stand and got set up. The tree stand is in a timber full of thorn bushes and a bunch of tall oak trees. As we sit in the stand

listening we hear birds chirping and squirrels fighting. All of sudden we keep hearing leaves crackling and popping up ahead of us. We knew this wasn't a squirrel when we heard a tree limb get broken. Crack.... We have a big buck coming straight at us. I got my gun up and tucked into my shoulder ready to shoot. Click... as I snap the safety off my gun. Deep breath as I slowly exhale it out. Bang....!!! I ended up shooting the biggest buck in our family. This was a dream come true. Being a farm kid/country boy, this is something I have always dreamed about.

Being a farm kid isn't easy at all! It comes with being responsible and mature. Waking up to an alarm clock each morning at four thirty to get outside to get the cows fed is one of the hardest things. My father has shown me a lot of responsibility as I have grown into the man I am today. As I sit outside in my wooden swing going back and forth watching the flowers dance and the birds singing I think of everything my dad has taught me. I start walking around the house to see what my family is doing. The wind picks up and makes my eyelashes tickle. I didn't have a clue what was going on, but all of sudden I heard a loud boom! My father had struck the end of the garage with the hay bale. All of a sudden I heard my father yell, "Andrew, hurry up.... hurry.... !" I took off sprinting in the wet grass. My feet felt like I just went swimming in a river. Only from there did I know that it was not going to be a good day on the farm! I ran and grabbed gloves as dad had the hay bale roll off the back of the truck. It was my job to get it put into the shed. This taught me a lot as when things aren't going as planned don't give up. Work harder, and get the job done. Responsibility will get you a long way in life.

The farm really showed me what life is all about. Waking up early in the morning and getting right to work. Having responsibilities and being reliable for my family. The adversity you have to overcome in life is just like a cow getting out of the fence. The way

you react to it is going to be the same way you react to something not going your way. I am lucky to have grown up the way I did and to know how to react when things don't go the way you want. As I sit here in the living room with my dad to my left sitting on the couch with my mom, and the wooden stove going, I think of all the kids that didn't get to grow up like this. How did they learn all of these characteristics? These characteristics have helped me a lot with my maturity and responsibility in school/college. The farm has taught me to succeed not only on the farm, but also outside of it. I know that I grew up the right way and that is on a farm.

My Special Place

Fay Madison

My special place is like no other; it's truly unique and almost irreplaceable. The craziest part is it's no more than a grass field, numbered a hundred yards in length and 50 yards wide. When it rained the field would become even less impressive, the field would become tracked up with cleat marks and skids from thousands of hard plants and cuts and would smell of dew and thawed soil. At least twice a week a train, which would appear to go on for years, would make it impossible to hear an explosion due to the blaring horn and the freight train swallowing the tracks as it chugged on . I know you're probably wondering how could my special place be so basic and/or common, but this place was the only place I could escape and clear my mind. This magic field could clear my mind of all problems, from a heartbreak to stress, and replace them all with joy and relief.

My sophomore year of high school I lost my stepdad, who practically raised me. He left behind three biological kids and two step kids to my mom. We never really had any support from the rest of our family, other than my grandma who had been diagnosed with Alzheimers shortly after. So we would tend to struggle, but this wasn't anything new; my mom had always been the only source of income and would carry the load for seven dependents, and when my step dad passed she would take up two jobs, working close to twenty hours a day, and we'd rarely see her at all. Everything felt like it was constantly falling apart, and I'd be constantly stressed seeing my siblings and mom cry and retreat into shells. The only thing that would ease the constant stress was the

field, Earhart field to be exact. It'd be one of the only places where I felt I could be in control.

Day in and day out we'd build a family, which I had badly needed, on that field. People who would tend to go through the same struggles would unite here. I remember my friend Nathan, had lost his father my junior year in the middle of spring ball. He couldn't be around his family because it'd bring back the thoughts of it all and he'd succumb to the pain and dark thoughts. So he'd spend more time with us than ever before during this time. Whether it'd be something as simple as extra work after practice, games of catch, or running through plays we scripted, followed by crazy talks on how we should be the coaches, until the sun would set. There'd be a number of times where we'd just reenact the arguments Nathan and the coaches would have almost dying in laughter after each parody. I remember one practice Nathan and our defensive coordinator had gotten into an argument during an extremely competitive practice between the Offense and Defense. Our coaches were all for the competitive spirit but couldn't allow it to get out of hand because we were all on the same team, not two, and our trash talk didn't help. Of course I'd be the one on the other end trash talking Nathan, who was on the other side of the ball. My coach had called out to me and told me to "stop talking" and to "shut up" and I did exactly that. After I remember Nathan shouting out that we, the defense, "wanted no smoke". Our defensive coordinator then told Nathan to "shut up and just play", and of course Nate being Nate, responded telling him "don't worry about me worry about your side of the ball". This ended in the two face to face, and Nathan yelling to the coach "I'm not no little boy..I'm a man", eventually being split up by the team. It was all love though, the coach and Nathan laughed about it after, and we still talk about it till this day whenever we reminisce of the

field. If I had it, he had it. It didn't start like that of course, but that changed quickly. It was almost inevitable. I remember times when we were counted out, and told we were not good enough, from numerous radio stations and news outlets. No one backed us up or was ever in our favor, so we went to war alone. To the rest of the world we were poor, country , and undisciplined thugs who could never accomplish anything. Week after week we were the predicted losers, no matter how good we played or how many times before we'd proved all the non-believers wrong. We had to learn to rely on each other, and become accountable for one another. We all shared the same common goals, and played for all the same reason, causing a sense of unity on the field.

We had each other through the good because we all worked together for a common purpose and oftentimes shared the same goals on that football field. We were like cars, all of us assembled to get the job done, if one part didn't do its job we couldn't run as a whole and would need repairing. We'd learn this my first two years on the field, as we all were what you call "Me" players, causing us to go 1-9 the first year and 2-8 the second. The field taught us the importance of unity, how to lift each other up, and to have one another's back. And when we failed to do this, the field would punish, reminding us through failure.

I remember playing Georgetown Eastview my sophomore year. My heart beating a thousand miles per hour, the crowds' words inaudible as they roared as the stadium filled with smoke. The visitor side was almost completely vacant while people fought for seats on the home side, filled with a whole world of people we didn't know. We'd become accustomed to being fanless, as we'd previously gone 1-9 and 2-8, we were given up on. Although none of that really mattered to us at the time, all that mattered was our 11 versus their 11 at all times. The second to last game on the schedule showed a team

looking for change. Before the game was different, seniors and juniors talked about how much the game meant to them and how it was almost over without a lick of success. In this game we played our hearts out, playing for one another, as it was the last ride for a lot of people who the field and the game meant everything to. After an unsuccessful QB option was stopped in its tracks, and the clock ran out of time. We played for one another and almost won, to a team who sports analysis predicted we couldn't even compete with, ultimately losing the game on the 1 yard line.

On that field it didn't make a difference whether one was a 2.0 gpa student, if one was poor, or whatever the case may be. Here anything is achievable, and your destiny and legacy is whatever you make it. I grew up poor. I can remember walking through the hallways being made fun of , because my sneakers talked, and I didn't have the newest clothes. No matter what I tried or where it tried, I couldn't fit in. The field would be the only place to take me in, as it did thousands before nonjudgmentally, ultimately allowing me to make my own image, and giving me both purpose and hope. I tend to feel like a star with my name is buzzing floating around the whole state of Texas. Colleges were coming to see me on a daily basis, I was asked to star in a magazine and etc. This meant a lot to me, because I came from nothing and had no identity, and I felt I reached heights a lot of people failed to reach on this field, achieving goals I'd once dreamed about.

Where I'm from the odds of leaving the small town were low, you'd either end up dead or in jail, or working like a slave your whole life, complacency almost inevitable. A lot of times I'd feel like a nobody, alone, and as if my destiny had already been appointed. I always made good grades but where was that going to get me? I couldn't afford college, even with loans, and surely couldn't put that weight on my mother's

shoulders. Earhart field offered me a way out, a way to level up and put myself in a great position in life. I've been given this same opportunity in college. This place is the place almost anyone can run to when it feels like the work is collapsing on your shoulders. The memories made here are unforgettable. Four years will feel like a lifetime! And you'll leave with many essential tools in life, like discipline, and a work ethic.

Ghosts and Recovery

Jessica Hodges

In 2009, I met a man named John. I hadn't been seriously looking for love, but I was on a dating site. I was curious about the people who had profiles on the site; there were so many different personalities looking for so many different things. I met John on OkCupid. He was charming, intelligent, and confident. He seemed to be everything I thought I wanted in a partner. John changed my life, and although the effects of the abuse he put me through may last for years to come, I am learning what it is to love and honor myself.

The first year we dated, John swept me off my feet. He was the first man to ever buy me jewelry. He bought me an e-reader for my birthday, knowing how much I loved to read. It was something I had been looking into buying for myself for months. He even went the extra mile and tracked down an earlier model, one that could be rooted, just in case I wanted to add third-party software. I would be out with friends in town, texting him occasionally about what was going on and how my night was going, and he'd surprise me by showing up unannounced. He asked me questions dealing with politics, leading to me becoming more involved and politically active. I did my own research and formed my own opinions on matters I had never put much thought into before, such as taxes and immigration. He carried himself like he was unbothered by the opinions others held of him. That was a trait I admired until it became obvious that he could brush off criticism because he didn't seem to care about other people; everyone was disposable and replaceable. At least, until they tried to leave.

In the nearly eight years we were together, John and I had two children. Those kids are the center of my life now. My oldest child is eight-and-a-half-years old. I have been a stay at home mom since he was born, with the exception of a couple of part-time jobs that amount to about a year of employment combined. It's certainly not the life I had imagined as a child or teenager. I never saw myself as a parent, and certainly not as someone who would try to homeschool. Children who were home-educated were something John wanted, not me, but a desire to keep him happy and in my life had an effect on my willingness to reconsider.

When we argued, John always seemed to come away as the victor or the victim. He was always right, or I had somehow wronged him. We'd have a disagreement about something, and he would get upset and ignore me. He would continue to ignore me until I became anxious and started asking questions about why he was upset, what I had done, and preemptively apologizing. I have an anxiety disorder, and one of the ways this manifests is making me very sensitive to perceived rejection. He took full advantage of this, pushing the things he wanted, and withdrawing affection and attention if I did not agree. More often than not, I came away from these disagreements feeling confused and unsure of the reasoning that led to the outcome. I would find myself thinking, *Why did I agree to that? That's not what I wanted at all! Why am I always the one making concessions?*

My history with John is complicated. There was a lot of moving from place to place, and there were other people involved. John was non-monogamous. For a while, this was a point of conflict; it resulted in us separating for roughly a year. When we reconciled, he was dating two other people, Caitlyn and Marie. John would get upset when "his girls" weren't all getting along. He would lecture us about how we should be

friendly, be family, and how we have at least one great thing in common: him. This encouraged more conflict than it avoided. Once, when Marie and I were getting along and had become friends, John and Marie had an argument. It was one of many that involved breaking up and reconciling a day or two later. During this particular fight, Marie was texting me, letting me know what was going on, and showing me screenshots of the awful messages John was sending her. This was one of many glimpses into a very unhealthy, unstable relationship. When John found out Marie and I were still talking, he turned on me and accused me of not caring about his feelings. He threatened to no longer talk to me. I had to laugh at that. We lived together, had two children together, and he relied on me to prepare his meals; silence didn't seem like a punishment that could last long. John expected me to drop my friendship with Marie on his say-so because he was upset with her. She was my friend though, and she was hurting too. This stands out to me as one of the earliest instances in which I started enforcing boundaries with John. Perhaps I couldn't stand up for myself, but I could stand up for her.

In 2016, John started talking about how he wanted us all to move to Florida. He brought it up several times over a period of months. He and Caitlyn went on a vacation to an area of the state he was interested in. When they returned, he was even more excited. I was absolutely opposed to the idea of moving there. This is the second boundary that comes to mind when thinking about the ways I stood up to him. I told him I would not move to Florida. He protested and tried to convince me my reasoning was invalid. I told him I wasn't keeping him, Marie, or Caitlyn from going. He became angry. He accused me of being selfish and "making unilateral decisions" for everyone else, "just like you always do." He raged for a while, and then it was never brought up again.

Although arguments about Florida faded to nothing more than a bad memory, life didn't improve much; nothing was ever good enough for John. He was always finding something to criticize, whether it was the length of my hair, the order of the layers of his sandwich, or the color of the outfit I wore. When you live with that every day, nothing feels worth doing because you become convinced that you can't do anything right. At least, not to the critic's standards. So you stop trying.

I can not recount every example of abuse I endured from this man; I don't remember them all, and many of them I dismissed because one of the other women had it worse. I didn't think of myself as abused at the time either. What I endured always felt mild in comparison to what Marie went through. Put yourself in her shoes for a moment: Imagine being suicidal, getting into an argument with a person who professed to love you, and then that person telling you, "go die." Imagine that person telling you that you deserve every bit of the horrible things they say to you. Imagine them telling someone else, someone you both know, that you can cut yourself in two for all they care. Imagine them calling you later in the day and leaving you a voicemail saying, "We both say things when we're angry. It would be better if you could just go back to being the way you were before last night." That was Marie's reality. Maybe it still is; they're married now. If I try to imagine what it would be like to still be involved with that man, my anxiety spikes. My chest tightens, and my stomach flips. I never want to be on the receiving end of those behaviors again. He wanted a say in what I wore, the medications I put into my body, the style and color of my hair, what I ate, and so much more. He wanted to be in charge; he often criticized my independence and lack of submission to him. If I stood up for myself, he insisted I was trying to dominate him, and that was unacceptable. If I didn't do things his way, then clearly his opinion didn't matter, and I

didn't care about him. There were classic examples of gaslighting, triangulation, and other methods of manipulation. The guilt and shame he piled on each of us were never-ending.

In September of 2017, John and I broke up. I had developed feelings for a close friend of mine, and I wanted to pursue them. Given that John was non-monogamous, and had three or more girlfriends at the time, it seemed like something to talk about. John and I had been living like roommates for months by this point; there was hardly any intimacy between us. John was not having it though. "If I let you do that," he said, "I would have to let the other girls, too. If you do this, you are leaving me."

So, I left.

A lot has changed since then. I moved out near the end of October of that year. The children came with me. We stayed at my mother's house for a while, and then we were invited to live with a friend here in Saint Joseph, where we have been since April of 2018. I saw a couple of therapists when I was involved with John, but their primary focus was on helping me with my anxiety around driving. In September of last year, I started seeing a psychiatrist for help with depression and generalized anxiety. In January of this year, I started seeing a therapist specifically to deal with healing from my relationship with John. When I started dating again and really connecting with people in 2019, I realized that I was effectively seeing ghosts. Someone would say or do something, and I would immediately tense up, trying to figure out what their intentions were. Is this something John would have done? I had become so used to needing to read between the lines and looking for what he was intentionally not saying. Now, any time an action or a bit of speech seemed remotely similar to something he might have said or

done, I was back in that place with him, trying to figure out what was going on and if I had done something wrong.

I still have to deal with John. That won't change for the next thirteen years or so. He still puts me down, criticizes me, and tries to tell me what I "must" do. It happens less now; there is a custody dispute, and he knows he is being watched. Therapy helps. Reading literature about recovering from abuse helps. Being involved with a man who understands that sometimes I am not reacting to what he has said or done, but to what someone has said or done in my past, helps. I am healing, taking care of myself, and working towards the life I want.

Overcoming the Greatest Fear

Steven Hotham

As I buckle myself into the helicopter seat, I can feel my stomach starting to knot. I know soon I will be upside down and underwater in this helicopter crash simulator. The stress and anxiety started to overcome me, but I knew I had to stay calm in order to pass this test and continue in my career in the military. I believe fear and doubt can be overcome with a positive and calm mindset. In the military I had to train to survive a helicopter crash in water, which caused a lot of fear and doubt, through calm thinking I was able to complete the training.

When I got to the pool for my helicopter crash training, there was a pit in my stomach. I could smell the chlorinated water and feel the cold breeze of an early morning spring. Seeing the actual size of the crash simulator made the fear worse. The entire group could not concentrate on the instructor's words, just staring at this monster wondering how the whole process would happen. Before we jumped straight into the simulation, we took baby steps. We had to get used to breathing underwater without breathing through our nose. Once we were confident with breathing, we had to get flipped upside down on the pool wall. I experienced water rushing up my nose and having to take my breathalyzer out, and put it back in full of water. The next test was sitting in a chair with a roll cage around it a plastic window that would pop out if I pushed with enough force. The instructor would say "Ditching, Ditching, Ditching" as he flipped the chair over. When I was underwater, the world seemed to stop. The only thing screaming in my head was grab my respirator and clear the water out so I can breathe.

Once I learned to stay calm, I got a rhythm down and realized it's not so bad, and can be fun. It also showed me I was confident in one of my biggest fears. I just had to relax and think before I acted or else I would panic and fail.

After learning the basics, we got to perform the actual helicopter dunker. I had to go through five stages to pass the simulation. The first stage was without a respirator. It was a shocking feeling to not be able to breathe. The second stage was with a respirator. This stage was the easiest, because I could breathe and could think through the process clearly. The third was without being able to see. This stage, while not the hardest, was still stressful because of the amount of memory it took to remember the location of what I needed. The fourth stage was with a weapon, and blindfolded. I had to throw my weapon once I was underwater, while not being able to see. It was challenging to not hit anyone else when trying to get out. The last stage was blindfolded, holding a weapon, and wearing a weighted vest. This was the most difficult stage because there were multiple steps to do while blind. All of these steps also had to be done within a realistic time period. The first time performing this test, I failed, and had to go back the next day and do it again.

The first stage affected me the most emotionally. I experienced fear because I did not know what would happen. I began to second guess myself, and question my judgement. The second stage taught me to slow down, and trust my actions. It was easier to act calmly while able to breathe. The last stage was my most challenging. I have a fear of water, and the inability to see, and not be able to move easily, was extremely scary. After failing I felt very disappointed and had anxiety knowing I had to do it again

the next day. I passed the second day, and I was so proud of myself, knowing I had finally completed a very difficult training exercise.

I believe fear and doubt can be overcome with a positive and calm mindset. In the military I had to train to survive a helicopter crash in water, which caused a lot of fear and doubt, through calm thinking I was able to complete the training. Overcoming fear has made a drastic impact on my life, that still affects me to this day. I feel this is important because many people let fear cloud their judgement. Fear of the unknown can be a major obstacle. Overcoming this fear can open many doors in life, and can create confidence in all aspects.

Under the lights

Brooklynn Leal

When you first walk into the theatre at Truman high school, all you can see is rows and rows of bright red chairs, a stage mostly made of elm wood and, depending on how far the upcoming show is, a freshly painted black stage. But if you looked closer you could see that those bright red chairs were actually covered in stains, or that there were a couple of seats missing every few rows. The wood would look like it was freshly stained until you looked up close. It was rough and busted, but when the audience lights were off and the stage was lit, it was beautiful. The reality of life is you always find your 'place' when you least expect it.

Growing up I never lived in one home for too long, and when eventually it seemed that my family had finally found a place to call home, I was drifting back and forth from one house to the other, never there for more than three or four days. The only exception was that once a week I got with my mom and one with my dad, but other than that I had two homes that never really felt like home. Halfway through the summer before my junior year of high school we lost our house, having to move yet again but this time to a home that truly was home. My entire life I had never known of a place I could just be me, a place that no matter who you are or where you come from no one would judge you, but then I found the theatre.

I had never done theatre, but a friend from choir encouraged me to branch out and try something new. So by the time auditions rolled around I somehow found myself sitting there front row listening to everything the director was saying. The director, Mr. Meyer, was splitting us into two groups, the first half would sing and read lines, and the

second was learning dances. I got stuck in the second group, and from there we set into pairs. My partner was a freshman boy named Ayden Smith, who spent most of his time just cracking jokes. He didn't want to be there but he was making too much of a commotion while his friend was auditioning so he got roped into it. We poorly learned our steps, and then it was time for the singing, I have always loved to sing. When I was younger my family and I would play American Idol on our Xbox, but singing in front of people who weren't my family was terrifying. By the time it was my turn to sing, my heart was beating so fast I could hear it in my ears. My face was burning and my hands were sweating. I recited the song countless times in my head yet as I stepped through the doors the words left my brain and I no longer could think of the song. Soon my nerves calmed and the words returned to me and I sang. Then "bam!", just like that I had landed myself a small supporting roll and man, was I excited, I had a line.

Rehearsals started the week after auditions so we all showed up excited and extremely nervous. We all highlighted all the days and times on our schedules that we were meant to be there, and just like that I was in the choir room almost every afternoon learning the song, the placement and making some of the best friends I'd ever have.

Rehearsals went quick and next thing I knew it was opening night. Caked with makeup and what felt like twenty pounds of clothes. The opening song 'The Prince is giving a Ball' began to play and my nerves shot up. When I heard my cue, I walked out on stage, face burning with anxiety. As I sang my line all I could see was faint shapes of people sitting in the front row. It wasn't like those few seconds on stage that made me realize how much I love theatre. It was the way it felt when the show was done and we all ran from the stage out to the door so we could thank everyone for coming. Then after, we'd all go to a random restaurant, which was more than likely close to closing.

Theatre became my life. I fell in love with the way it felt to be a part of a team. By the end of my junior year I had somehow become friends with the seniors who ran the International Thespian Society (ITS): Which is really just a fancy way to say theatre club, and when it was time to vote on a new board I had been voted as the new President of ITS. By the time school had started I was already making plans on things we'd be doing that year, like poster bowl and trunk or treat. I had no clue what I was doing, mainly because I had never been in charge of anything other than myself, but I learned. I learned how to be a good leader and how to be kind, even when I was stressed and overwhelmed. I got the opportunity to be a big mama bear to all my theatre babies. I got to love them and teach them how to be good leaders. Eventually not just theatre and the after school activity, but the theatre with the missing and broken chairs and big scuffed stage became my home.

Theatre isn't just about the acting and singing, At least it was not for me. It's about the friendships made... and the acting and singing. I loved being in the theatre because of the way the atmosphere felt, even when you were all alone with all the lights off except for the ones on the stage. There were days I got so overwhelmed with the world around me, times I felt I could not breath. I would just go sit on the edge of the stage and just stare into the audience... alone. Those fleeting moments until a group of giggling girls would walk by. Sitting there on that stage is where I did my best thinking. I would come in during study hall and just sit and do my homework. The peace it brought me, the quiet that it held when no one was there but me.

The worst part of a show is the third night. No matter what, it always ends up being a mess, no matter what show or even the cast or the crew. By the third night, the opening night jitters have worn off, and more than likely the audience feels the same.

People are crying, props are missing and no one's laughing Except one kid three rows back, so it just feels awkward and wrong. But by the forth night; closing night, the energy is back. Some are excited that the show is almost over, but most are crying by the end of 'break-a-leg' because all the seniors have said the words every underclassmen has been dreading to hear: "thank you for being my best friends, I love every one of you with every part of you I am". For many seniors it will be their last show and having to realize that is hard. Then the show is over and you all have one last dinner, and then everything goes back to the way it was before. All alone on stage and way more time than you know what to do with.

Despite being new and having hardly any friends, the theatre filled a hole that I didn't even know I needed filled. It gave me somewhere quiet to go when I needed to think. I gained friends that soon became family. I walked into that theatre not knowing it was the last time I'd walk into it as a student. First block on Friday 13th we had just started building the set for the spring play 'Picnic'. When the world shut down because of Coivd-19, I lost the chance to say goodbye to the theatre and I lost the chance to perform one last time with the people I love the most. Theatre is more than just some silly club, it is the place I found myself. The place I learned to take charge and be a leader. Sometimes all you need is a little push to be the best possible version of yourself. Every show has a lesson just like every life has a meaning. You may not see the point at first but give it time, your purpose will shine through

A Journey of Endings and Beginnings

Wesley Luetkemeyer

The meaningfulness of a place resides within us; otherwise, it is merely a location where everyone can go. To make it unique or meaningful, we must incorporate emotion and memories with this place. My place is not a location one can go to anytime they wish; it is a place that dwells within. It lives inside me, going wherever I go. I would not call this a happy place, as it is also a place of immense pain and suffering—a place unescapable from the wandering mind, especially after almost losing my life. A second chance at life is something we rarely get, something that only a few have the luxury of claiming. I am one of those few, and I plan to make the most of it.

Out of high school, I began working, waiting for my date to go to basic training. I wanted to join the Air Force; Civil Engineering was the plan, but I never got to the point of picking my job. After the struggle of trying to go to the civilian medical doctors, who refused to see me unless they agreed to via my medical history. An awfully long and unnecessarily complicated process that turns away candidates to join before the doctor sees them. It makes little sense as to why they do it this way, rather than see me to verify that I am healthy and fit to join. I received a call from my recruiter in the spring of 2016, stating I was medically disqualified from joining due to a concussion I received in high school, ADD, and chronic migraines. I was cleared from the first two in the summer of 2013, and I never had chronic migraines. However, there is no appeal process for any disqualification. A few months after that, I started going from job to job, increasing my pay and experience; I finally began working for a private contracting stripe company. They specialize in striping the roads of the state after it has been freshly paved. The

hours were long, but the money was good. I had only worked there for about thirteen weeks before the incident. October 17, 2018 is the date that will forever be etched into my mind.

We were working down in Branson, MO, on a highway on the western side of town. It was early in the day, around ten o'clock am, if I remember right. The air was still cool from the night before; the sun was barely peeking through the clouds to warm us up. I was tasked with unloading materials off one of the fifteen-ton trucks to put the arrows and stop bars in place. The truck was positioned at the bottom of a slope on one side of the highway we were working on. Over fifteen-tons, our striping truck was at the opposite side of the road, at the top of this slope. As I got off the material truck, placing the heavy box on the dolly, I looked up to see the striping truck heading my way. After a second look, I realized there was no driver, and the passenger wheel was lined up to my body.

It was roughly 10" away from me when I made this realization; the material truck was to my left, and nowhere to go on my right. The Island began to plummet towards the surface of the ocean. My survival instincts kicked in, and my body seemed to move without thinking of what to do. I crossed my arms over my chest and jumped into the air; then, the collision happened. It was as if all the sound in the world had been turned off for a split second. As soon as it returned, all I could hear was the sound of metal on metal, accompanied by my own screams of pain. Although I do not remember much pain initially, I believe the shock had set in almost instantly. Given the severity of my injuries, it made sense. I was thrown over the hood of the material truck and onto the gravel in front, then silent.

As the dust settled, I lay on my right side, facing the trucks. I looked around slowly to see what had happened; I was still unsure. Much like a disorienting blow to the head from a nasty fall or a stunned victim of an explosion in some action movies. I saw the damage done to the trucks; a broken mirror, a pipe used to load paint was on the ground, and the dolly was unrecognizable. I tried to stay as still as possible, learning through playing football if you are hit hard enough not to move in case of a spinal injury. Without moving my head, I looked down towards the direction everyone else was. I saw them slowly coming up to see what had happened. I remember shouting, “Help, man down!” in a sarcastic tone. I knew the situation was serious, but I used humor to help put others at ease, as I always do in these situations. If they saw that I was in good spirits, there was a chance of lifting their spirits in that dire mess. As they rounded the truck to see what had happened, I saw the look on one of my coworker’s face. It looked like he had seen a ghost. So, with me being me, I shot him a smile to assure him I would be okay. Little did I know the severity of the situation.

That was only the beginning of a long, painful road. The stars must have been aligned just right; one of the guys I was working with is a retired Army vet, and the overseeing contractor was also a part-time paramedic. While instructing the others, those two made the best attempt at first aid and to stop the bleeding. Once the ambulance arrived, the on-duty paramedics took over and began using tourniquets to stop the bleeding and bandages from ensuring my leg was secured enough to move. I remember one of them stating, “don’t worry, we’re going to save your leg,” to which I replied, “good, I didn’t want to be a pirate for Halloween.” Then everything faded; they had given me a dose of ketamine for the pain. I have always described that being on

ketamine was the equivalent to watching *Dr. Strange* and *Inception* while on LSD. It was like staring into a rainbow sherbet being mixed into a shake without the colors blending. I do not remember much emotion when it happened; the only thing that crossed my mind was “Woah.”

After I woke up, I was at Mercy Hospital in Springfield, MO. I was still out of it, but I remember seeing my grandparents. They asked how I was doing as they took my hand, to which I responded in a hazy stammer, “like I’ve been hit by a truck.” My grandpa replied with a chuckle of reassurance and the words, “you’re gonna be alright, bud.” Then my parents came in, driving from Columbia, MO, to see me. I could tell she was in pain; the worry of her firstborn was all over her face. I smiled at her, saying the same to her as I did to my grandparents when asked how I felt. I do not remember how she reacted to this; I fell back asleep from the meds they gave me a few minutes before preparing for a five-hour surgery. When I woke up, I was in a hospital room, covered blankets, two IV’s in one arm and a single IV in the other. There was a large protrusion sticking up from under the sheets where my left leg was. I was told this is an external fixator, it is used for bad breaks, so the leg stays intact. After assessing its appearance, it looked like those Tinker toys kids used to play with. I also had two wound vacuums; these are for avulsions in the skin, essentially sucking out the bad stuff to keep it clean. After being transferred to University Hospital in Columbia, MO, I was finally informed of my injuries. All three leg bones snapped and exited my leg; my kneecap was shattered in place, the meniscus was torn, my LCL (lateral collateral ligament), and my foot was broken in five places. Two large avulsions, large tears of skin and muscle that are torn away from the body, were left where the femur and fibula came out, hence the need for

the wound vacuums. During the state fair, I was there for an event with the fire department, and I got the chance to meet with one of the paramedics that was on the scene of my accident. He was able to tell me a firsthand account of what my injuries were; with my femur being snapped and having exited my leg, the marrow was torn and was bleeding profusely. It was enough to where I would have bled out if it were not for the paramedics.

From day to night, and surgery after surgery. I spent nearly a month in the hospital before the final surgery in which I could go home. At first, the realization had not hit me; I had been in hospitals before but not to this extent. I figured I would be walking and back to work by the fall of 2019; how wrong I was. One morning the doctor came in to check how I was doing and to run some necessary tests. One of these was a sensory test, this is where he presses his pen to certain areas, and I say whether I can feel it. The moment he touched my foot, I felt nothing. I was not looking, so I did not know that he had done so. He asked if I could feel it, at which point I looked and saw him touching my left foot. All I could do was look to my parents with tears welling up; my instant thought was that I was paralyzed. All manner of thinking left me at that moment; I could not tell if this was real or a dream. I felt as if a log had been thrown against my chest. Then the doctor did some checking, assuring me that the peroneal nerve was crushed and could recover. It never did.

Days turn to weeks; I sat in the hospital, eating my lunch, when the thought finally hits me. Tears begin to stream down my cheeks as I begin to sob. My mom asks what is wrong, to which I reply in a shallow breath, "I almost died." A realization like this is not easily explained; I think it is equivalent to hearing a close relative has passed

but realizing it could have been you. I felt disconnected from myself, speechless, and unemotional. Whenever asked a question throughout that day, it was simplistic one-worded answers. That night my mother stayed the night at the hospital to make sure I was okay. The main thing that got me through this whole ordeal was the overwhelming support I have had from friends, family, and everyone in between.

After being released from the hospital, the leg still intact, the hard part truly began. At first, I needed to use a walker, which was hard to get used to with a naturally long stride. Going from living on my own to relying on others to do things for me was the hardest part. I never wanted to burden my parents since I was living with them now per doctors' orders. The worst part was the pain; seven to eight were unbearable, and hell on earth on the pain scale 24/7. After I was stable enough to be released from the hospital, I was sent to a RUSK rehab facility. The intent was to build up enough strength for mild independence. It was almost two weeks until I was released to go home finally. Unfortunately, I would need another surgery for the LCL that was lost in the accident. This did not occur until sometime in January of 2019; therefore, the holidays were spent recovering. I could not move my left leg other than bending the knee when needed and a single strenuous toe curl, which only increased the nerve pain. Whenever I would stand, blood would rush to my foot, which was unable to circulate due to lack of motion. It was like the rush in your head when hanging upside down, only ten times as painful. My walking was reduced to crutches for small distances; longer outings resulted in a wheelchair with my foot elevated. That was my life, wheelchair-bound due to the immeasurable pain.

After that surgery in January, I spent three days a week in physical therapy for one hour each session. I did what I could despite the pain, but it never subsided. Regardless of my efforts, my perennial nerve did not seem to be recovering. It began to curl down and inward from lack of use, stiffening into a point. I knew what I needed to do, but a decision like this is not easy to bring up. After a long thought process of pros and cons, I approached my parents. I laid my case out for them and made it clear that it would be the best option for me. Therefore, in June of 2019, I decided to tell the doctor that I wish to amputate my leg; so I could get on with my life. It was an easy decision for me after it was said and done, whereas it would not have been for someone else. The pros vastly outweighed the cons. Cons: I was wheelchair-bound due to mind-numbing pain, it was a 50/50 of whether I would even get feeling back or not, and even if I got the feeling back, no one knew what that would be. Pros: I would be walking again within a year.

The next challenge was the psychological trauma of the accident, being diagnosed with severe PTSD. Depression, severe anxiety, panic attacks along with PTSD were a challenge altogether. From the first day home from the hospital to the days leading up to the amputation, I never wanted to leave my bed. The pain was lessened as I laid there. I never wanted to do anything, mostly if it involved moving around. The car rides were incredibly hard because of those psychological problems; the slightest involuntary movement bumps in the road, the sound of gravel grinding under the weight of the vehicle; it all brought me back to that spot, back to that day I almost died.

Now its October 2020, I am a freshman in college, and I can walk wherever a vehicle is not required. Although I still have many restrictions due to the sensitivity of

my knee. I had to do what is called a BioJoint transplant, the transplant of cartilage that is still in the research phases. I am the first person in the world to have this transplant and an amputation performed simultaneously. I still have random spikes of nerve pain that feel like someone is touching my stump with a taser, but it is quick and more comfortable to handle than what the pain use to feel like. I am commonly asked about phantom pains; to my surprise, I have not had any yet. I was told that phantom pains depend on a few things; the length of time between injury and amputation, how clean the nerve is cut during the amputation, and how damaged the nerve is in general. For these examples, even the best-case scenario guarantees the variation of phantom pains.

As we go through life, many obstacles are thrown our way. Some have it differently than others; for me, it was a fifteen-ton truck and losing my leg. I have learned that no matter who you are, your trauma is no lesser than someone else's. I may have lost a leg, but that does not mean a broken foot is any less traumatic. We all handle these things in our way, and no one should diminish how it feels to you. With my second chance, I will make the most of it; I am already doing what I can by going to college. Something I would not have thought of before all of this. I am virtually pain-free and walking again; I am much happier than I have been in a long time.

The Joplin Tornado: How It Left an Impact

Natasha Maynard

"There is little you can do to stop a tornado, a hurricane, or a cancer diagnosis from changing your life in an instant" This quote by Ted Lieu resonates with me because I had the Joplin Tornado change my life. On May 22, 2011, a devastating EF-5 tornado hit Joplin, Missouri, going 200 mph and one mile wide, pummeling anything in its path. It left with 161 deaths and over 1000 injured by its catastrophic nature. It became the U. S's deadliest single tornado on record since the official records began in 1950, and it also became the costliest tornado with losses approaching \$3 billion. The Joplin Tornado was the scariest thing for a 9-10-year-old girl who barely understood how dangerous a tornado could be; this impacted me in a way that made me more protective of my mother, more anxious around severe storms, and it helped me reaffirm my faith.

All right, this is my story of the Joplin Tornado, and I had to have been 9 or 10 when this whole thing happened. I had gone with my Uncle Allen, Grandma Tatum, and my cousin Anna to my cousin Grace's dance recital. When Grace finished her dance recital, we went to a Braum's that was in Joplin, and after we had our ice cream, the workers told us that everyone had to leave because there was a tornado that had landed that coming our way and they didn't have a safe place for all the customer's, so we had to leave. Luckily, we were not far away from, so I went home quickly, and my mom told me to change into something else and pack some stuff into my brother's closet. So I changed my clothes, and I put some pillows, a few of my stuffed animals that I really couldn't have lived without at my age, two pairs of flip flops, a blanket, and maybe a couple of

clothes, I don't remember that though. Mom was still getting things together, and in this case, it was all her receipts, bills, and anything with taxes, and while she was doing that, I looked at the tv that had the weather channel. I saw all the red on the screen and had asked her if that meant there was a tornado, and she said yes, and I panicked a bit. I managed to get my mother in the closet just in time because 30 seconds later, the tornado hit us. Just before the tornado hit, though, my mom and I heard what sounded like a freight train, and then everything happened. I closed my eyes and prayed that everyone in my family and I would not be hurt or killed by the tornado, and none of them were. The tornado sucked up the roof along with the rest of the house, and the only part of the house to remain reasonably intact was the closet my mother and I were inside. My mother was thankful that I had two pairs of flip flops because, in her hurry, she did not bring a pair of shoes, and nails were sticking up in the debris. I don't know how my mother and I got out because we were stuck in my brother's closet, but my mom and I could have sworn that it was a miracle that somebody helped us out, and my mom could have even sworn he was an angel because he was there one moment and gone the next. After that, we took refuge in a neighbor's house up the street that brought people in a while waiting for their families to get them. My Grandma Maynard picked us up with several other family members from dad's side and my dad and took us to my Aunt Lucy's house where my brother was, and that was all to the event that I remember.

I have two moments that made me realize that I have become protective of my mother. The first one was when I got my mother into our miracle shelter. I saved her life that day, and had I not been protective that day, I may not have had a mother anymore, and I most likely would not be alive either because she kept us from being sucked up. However, the other moment was after the tornado when my Aunt Lucy was letting us

stay with her. It had been three weeks after the tornado, and my mother hadn't been going to work because she was too panicked to go back yet and my Uncle Frank, who doesn't live with my Aunt Lucy, was bullying her telling her that she should go back to work and quit being lazy and overall being a jerk to her. I do not remember a lot after the tornado, but my mother said that I had defended her and told him to back off, showing that I was protective of her once again. Even now, I would still protect my mom from anyone who is being a jerk to her.

Since the tornado, I have found that I start to get anxiety every time there is a tornado warning. I found this out because every time there is a tornado warning, my brother and I are packing stuff into the storm shelter, and I would start to dread the worst. When mom does not join the storm shelter, I begin to worry a lot and its worse than when we are there. I do not know what happens, but my heart starts racing, and I start to panic a little when my family is not in the storm shelter with me. For example, this one time at school, a tornado landed somewhere close to Carl Junction, I think, and we went to the storm shelter, and I was freaking out because I couldn't get ahold of my dad to make sure he was safe at work. He is the only one that responds to his phone at work; sometimes, my mom never has her phone on unless it is a break. Like I have a horrible fear of spiders, so I dread that when we enter the storm shelter, and even that is not as worrisome as not having my mother in the storm shelter with us.

I had briefly written about the stories that helped me reaffirm my faith in the Joplin Tornado story. To let you know, I am Christian, even when I feel it is hard to believe, I still push through. One part of the story was me praying for my family and I's lives. I think God answered my prayers that day because there is no way my mother and I should be here today. Logically we should have been sucked away by the tornado

because my mom was holding the door shut to an EF-5 tornado, and that does not seem logical. The other part of the story is when my mom swore; she saw an angel. I was inclined to believe her because the person who came to help us was there one moment, and the next moment is gone as if he vanished in thin. I have no other way to explain it, so I believe it was another miracle because we were trapped in that closet by the debris covering the door.

You know it is strange to write about something that happened nine years ago now, and while the images are so vivid, your memory is starting to falter. I found that this writing about how this impacted me gives an example of how the devastating Joplin Tornado affected many. Many were without homes; I mean, I was one of them, and *I* almost lost everything. What is most important to me is that my family made it through, and we can only grow stronger from it just like Joplin. This Quote by Barbara De Angelis represents how the people of Joplin have survived the Joplin Tornado of 2011's devastating effects "We don't develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity."

“How My Life Changed”

Roman Myscowski

As I stuffed the items into my bag, I thought to myself “I could go to jail for this!” Every 3 years in band, central high school plans a trip down to some place, like for example, the last time they went down to Disneyland during winter break to march in a parade. This time they decided to go down to Florida, to Universal Studios in Orlando, which was a theme park with roller coasters. It was going to cost 1,500\$ and was going to be during our junior year of high school. They gave each of us fundraisers to help collect the money and so for 2 and a half years I saved up for this trip. The year came and we were all down at Universal Studios parking lot, coming off an 18 long hour bus ride, so we were all ready to have some fun. The band teachers then divide us into groups of four so that everyone could keep track of each other. I got bunched with 3 other guys who were the most popular kids in the band that year, so I was pretty excited to have this group since I didn’t have any other friends to hang out with and I knew that I was going to have fun with them. With our groups set and ready to go, we began our journey into the theme park.

Don’t allow the opinions of others to make decisions for you, live your own life and not for others. My group decided that they wanted to do a ride called Transformers: The Ride 3D, which had a 3 hour waiting time. We looked down at the line, and observed how it started on the outside, and slowly worked itself inside the massive building. As we began our 3 hour wait time outside, we started to slowly get to know each other, by playing games like 20 questions and the Heads Up app on our phones.

The aroma of freshly made churros wafted through the air next to us, which was like torture because we just had to stand and be hungry, since we could get out of line. We were waiting for two hours now, when I slowly started to get a migraine because of little hydration and no shade and by the time we got into the building, we still had another hour to go till we could get on the ride. The walls were covered with tons of tv screens, showing demonstrations on how to buckle the seat belt, how to deal with carry on items, etc. The sound from the tv's were blaring through some large speakers that were on the ceiling, so there was no way from missing out on the information. The place was crowded to the max with people and there was air conditioning or any fan to deal with the amount of body heat that was being generated and the pungent smell of everybody's sweat from how hot it was engulfing the air. The resounding noise coming from the tv's were very super annoying after 10 minutes. At this point my head was pounding from the migraine, and I was starting to get really claustrophobic since there were no exits in sight. The line to the ride made you go through go through some hallways that freaked me out, because of how narrow they were, but I continued to remain calm and not say anything to my group about it, because I didn't want them to think, that I was some type of deadbeat person in their group, and also didn't want to cause any problems, with having to meet up with them, after, if I were to leave the line. 30 minutes went by and I couldn't take the heat and confined spaces no longer, and I reluctantly told them that I was going to find an exit and get some fresh air. After I said that, they told me that if I wimp out on them, that I couldn't hang out with their group any more, and then I would have to be by a teacher all day since I would not have a group then to hang with. I stayed for 10 more minutes until I started to get a panic attack because of my claustrophobia and decided to find a side exit and go outside. While trying to catch my breath outside, I

began to feel terrible for having to leave them like that, because I was freaking out so much. I had forced myself to stand in line for almost 3 hours while having trouble breathing and a pounding migraine, because I thought so highly of what their opinions were of me. My fear of their judgment of me controlled me to just “stick it out” and act like nothing was bothering me. Living life constantly thinking about what others think about you, is not something you should worry or stress about, and since it doesn't really matter. Going through that experience has really changed me to not care what other people may think of me, or about what I do, and has helped me to live a much happier life since. My behaviour of me acting like I was fine when I wasn't, because of the peer pressure that was put on me, is something I try to avoid in the future when I have those thoughts of trying to get approval of others. Having friends can lead to peer pressuring you, to do things that you may not want to, but end up doing it anyway. Friends who peer pressure you are friends that are not worth having.

Don't go along with decisions that you don't want to do just because others demand it of you. After I waited for them to get out of the ride, they didn't want me in their group no more as they had said, but I pleaded with them for me to stay in their group, and they eventually said yes (although I learned later why) and I went through the rest of the day just fine and made sure to not make them anymore upset by causing problems or not going on a ride. At the end of the day we all went into a gift shop and were just browsing at all the cool stuff they had, and while we were looking at some hats that had the universal studio logo on them, the group told me that they wanted me to steal each of them a 25\$ universal studio hat because they didn't want to pay for it and I “owed” them for letting me back into their group and that they would be waiting outside for me. At this point I should have looked them in the eyes and said “No way!” and

walked out of there, but sadly I did not, I instead, started to think about whether or not I should go through with this, just so I could stay with them. My palms began to get sweaty and I suddenly had butterflies in my stomach and a nauseating feeling, while I tried to make a decision. I had never stolen anything major in my life before, and I was freaking out of my mind and started to get that panic attack feeling in my chest of not being able to breathe correctly, so I forced myself to calm down and take some deep breaths and continued to think about it. After thinking, my decision was made, and I regretfully stuffed the 3 hats into my drawstring bag while no one was looking, and walked out the store. Afterwards I realized that if I got caught, that I could have gone to jail! This really has affected me deeply because I had always been taught that stealing is a horrible crime and my parents are also very strict about not stealing things, so for me to steal those hats, it went against everything I believed in and I did it, because I just wanted to just fit in with this group of people. Since that time I have been very aware about not allowing people to peer pressure me into doing things that I don't want to do or realizing when I need to say no and to not just be a "sheep" like everyone else and it's helped me to take a stand for things that are wrong.

Certain people or in my case, a group of people, can lead you into doing things that you don't believe in strongly disagree with just because you want to fit in. If you have those types of people that you are hanging out with or are trying to get their approval of you then I would like to say that you should stop hanging around them, and find other people where you don't have to be someone else, to just be around them. I am lucky that I didn't end up doing something that would have lifetime consequences like being peer pressured into taking a drug or anything like that. I just hope that others

won't be so persuaded so easily by other people like I was. "Peer pressure is pressure you put on yourself to fit in!" - Jeff Moore.

Florida Trip Summer Twenty Twenty

Intisar Nourein

I went on this vacation expecting to have the time of my life with friends, but little did I know that I would leave Florida with a new perspective of life. Dying is something that I've always been scared of so, having a near-death experience in Hollywood, Florida without my family opened up my eyes to never take them for granted. The trip to Florida came about after I mentioned it to my friend Doretha as a senior trip since my Costa Rica trip was cut short in March due to COVID. I ran through a set of emotions planning this trips at times it was very stressful trying to get a hold of everyone to collect money before deadlines. I worked hard trying to find someone to rent us a car, and I felt anxious to see if everyone was going to follow through with going. In the end I came back with a sisterhood bond and began to cherish the people in my life more because I could lose my life any moment.

Then the day came, July eighth All seven girls gathered for the first time at my aunt's house, I couldn't contain my excitement. We pulled out of the driveway in a Chevrolet Suburban, all-white, spacious, with a cool breeze blowing from the ac, as we shouted the lyrics to our favorite songs on the aux while headed to drive through ST. Louis. I was the leader of the group. I planned, prepared, and invited all six of the females all from different backgrounds as they didn't know each other. Mashayla, Ashtin, Aris, Doretha, Abrar, and Susie. I was anxious/nervous about brining all of my friends together because I didn't know how everyone would get along. It was a twenty-hour drive and we drove straight through Kentucky, Nashville, Tennessee, Atlanta,

Georgia, Orlando, Florida, and finally reaching our destination Hollywood, Florida. As we entered Florida the beautiful scenery of the palm trees that I normally saw on the tv drew a huge smile on my face as I gazed in amazement. I opened the window on the highway soaking in the scorching Florida sun and screamed “we made it to Florida baby.” Even though we were still twenty minutes away from our Airbnb I spent the time looking out my window, inspecting the luxury cars in the five laned highways speeding by, and the tall exaggerated Highways, that I wasn’t used to seeing in Kansas City.

I surveyed our neighborhood as we drove up, there were long palm trees lined up along the sidewalks the type of scenery you’d see in a background photo on Pinterest. Our house was on the right side of a dead-end street, it was an off-white colored, medium-sized horizontally shaped, a Family style house. There were two trees on the front yard one on the right and one on the left side, the yard was divided by a concrete pathway leading to the front door. The front doors were mainly glass and there was a metal pin pad we used for entry. The house was like it had come alive from the pictures on Airbnb, everything was the same. The kitchen and living room greeted me upon entering the house on my right there was a huge gas stove which I’ve never used before, and on my left, there was a long leather gray couch in the living room. I darted to go find the master bedroom which I had already called dibs on. My jaw dropped when I saw my room, it was the biggest in the house, the tall glass windows aligned from left to right and there was a door in between separating each side. The door leads to our pool, a breathtaking view with a lake behind it and surrounding neighbor’s yards. Although it was beautiful, I feared the pool area because there were so many iguanas and lizards that I was terrified of. As I walked back into the master bedroom, I jumped on the queen size bed in relief as I stared at my reflection on the huge mirrored closet doors. No mom

calling our phone telling us to come back home, no dad telling us to not leave the house because of Covid-19, no school just freedom. I felt like a boulder was lifted off of my shoulders and it was time for me to let loose. We had made finally made it to the place where we would be calling home for the next six days because, on that last night that's where things took a turn for the worst.

The Evening before what could have been a tragedy, we came back to the Airbnb around three pm after a long morning at the beach. The girls were getting cleaned up to go to South Beach, Miami for dinner. It was a normal evening for us as we rushed around the house trying to get ready before six-thirty so we could make it to dinner and be home before the ten pm curfews in Miami. COVID-19 cases were still pretty high around July so there are many rules that we had to follow while on vacation in Florida including a curfew. Once the clock turned ten pm in Miami Beach there would be cops on each block telling everyone to get off the streets and go inside.

July fifteenth in North lake Hollywood, Florida at six am our neighbor Connie smelt a strong stench of gas coming from our house as she's in her yard. So, she came knocking on our Airbnb home for ten minutes in hopes that somebody would open the door, but sadly we all remained asleep throughout her knocking beside one girl. Another hour passed by and it's seven am now Connie comes back with her brother knocking on the front all because she's thinking "those poor girls" but she gets no response. At the same time, Doretha walked past the front door and into the kitchen to get some water and decided not to open the door for Connie because she stated she was "scared". Instead of waking anybody up she came back in the room and jumped right back into bed as we slowly slipped through the hands of the world.

It's eight fifty am now and I'm still alive god wasn't ready to take me yet, Connie had called the fire department after she left, and they had finally shown up. I remembered Mashayla woke me up in a rush speaking in a soft tone.

"Intisar the police are here"

My eyes lit up in confusion as I struggled to remove the huge white covers off of me while still half asleep, fighting to get the covers off of me while my friend stood at the end of my bed waiting for me, I finally threw them off feeling like I was trapped and needing to escape. I thought maybe the cops were here to question us about the hit and run, we witnessed the night before. Conclusions just circulating in my head, Did the man die? did the police just have some questions for us? I ran behind Mashayla almost tripping over my shoes that were left in front of my bed, she was dressed in a black washed Tupac t-shirt dress with her honey blonde mixed hair frizzed. I remembered the first thing I saw after walking into the living room I turned my head straight and all I saw was eight fifty am on the stove clock.

I heard yelling and knocking on windows throughout the house mind you the house wa full of glass doors and every room had one.

I heard someone yell, "OPEN THE DOOR HOLLYWOOD FIRE DEPARTMENT!" Another voice, "DON'T TOUCH ANYTHING!"

Another man, "YOU NEED TO EVACUATE IMMEDIATELY!"

I looked out scared I see a huge fire truck and that's when I realized this had nothing to do with the hit and run. So, what was wrong then? Why is the fire department here? There's no fire I'm sure this is a mistake. I opened the door for them

as Mashayla stood behind me on mute. Six men rushed in with huge Gas masks on as they shouted.

“YOU NEED TO LEAVE!”

They pulled both living room doors wide open, one man went into the kitchen, another went into the living room and began to open the windows, two of them go into the rooms, I’m still calm at this point just confused asking questions.

“What’s wrong?” “Who called you guys?”

One fireman said, “We got a call stating there’s a strong smell of gas coming from the residence.”

At this point I don’t smell anything wrong with the house, but I just began following orders. I rushed back into my room grabbed my phone off the bed and it’s on one percent which is oddly strange because I charge my phone every single night and put it by my head. As I ran back in the living room, I heard a fireman shouting.

“IT’S RIGHT HERE, IT’S COMING FROM HERE!”

Now I started to panic as I left the other firefighters come rushing into the kitchen. I run in my sister’s room to try and wake her up and there’s already two firemen in there one opening the doors and the other yelling at her and her friend to wake up and leave but she’s still unconscious. So, I begin to yell her name

“ABRAR, WAKE UP IT’S AN EMERGENCY!” As I hit her with a forceful smack on the back because I know she’s a deep sleeper.

The next thing I remember is were all sitting by the pool all seven of us girls everyone’s silent and confused and the chief of the fire department comes out to speak with us. He begins “I’ve been working as a firefighter for 20 years and I’ve never seen

anything like this before, that house was fully charged with gas. All it needed was for one of you guys to turn on a Light switch or plug your phone in the charger and today could have been a tragedy but, guess what? it's not tragic right." My friends began hysterically crying and the firefighter goes on "so, for two hours all of the windows and doors need to stay wide open. Do not use cellphones or anything" Listening to his words I'm in disbelief and shock, thinking about my mother I begin to cry as I glazed around the pool at all of my friends and sister watching them crying except Doretha. The twins Ashtin and Aris got on their knees and began crying and praised god on all fours. Mashayla was going into a panic attack but after a while, I couldn't help but reevaluate the situation and ask,

"So, who was it?" "Who left the kitchen stove on last night?"

and everyone went silent, I wasn't sure if it was because they were guilty or if they were wondering the same thing as me but regardless, I had to get to the bottom of it because this was a serious situation.

It's one- thirty pm now as we gathered for breakfast at First Watch while our meal was paid for by Airbnb as they prepared us a new house. We evaluated everyone's actions the night before. Ashtin and Aris had been watching tv in the living room, mashayla had been asleep on the couch, my sister and Susie had been in their room, and I was on facetime with my friends. Right before I got into the shower I walked into the kitchen and there Doretha was drinking Pink Whitney and dancing while recording herself.

She stopped to ask me, "How do you use the stove?"

I replied, “I don’t know I haven’t used it yet.” Walking out of the kitchen with a cold water bottle in my hand.

Hollywood, Florida symbolizes sisterhood and death for me, I went, I experienced, and I made once in a lifetime memory with these girls who were just friends to me before but now, they are family to me. Although I don’t speak to the girl who started the leak because she didn’t own up to her actions, I’m still close with everyone else and that bond can’t be broken, when we united our bond ties back to Florida. When people go on vacation with others, they learn a lot about each other, like how to understand them better, and learning their fears. Our friendship grew closer and tighter every day after waking up next to each other and almost not waking up together. I even learned about myself while on vacation in Florida, the people I met opened my eyes and showed me why I love to travel, to converse with people that come from a different background than me. When I look back at the events that took place in Florida, I get mixed emotions I feel a chill throughout my body from how close I came to death and I wish I hadn’t gone but I also feel blessed to have gained this sisterhood. Ever since I came back from Florida, I’ve made it a mission to attend every family event. I visit my nieces and nephews on the weekends when I go back home, and I’ve learned to appreciate the little things my parents do for me. I realized that this experience still affects me because I can’t sleep in my leopard print pajamas and my black “Everything’s better in Costa Rica 2020” t-shirt, the clothes that I wore that night anymore.

Then & Now
Kendra Opoku-Brenyah

Take a minute and think about all the guys you have been with. The guys you have stayed up all night talking to and going on dates with. They just were not it, were they? Now look, a nice guy comes your way, you doubt it first and say, “I don't want to be hurt again.” But your friends talk you into it, they tell you that you cannot keep pushing guys away because of your past. So, you think to yourself a, you can give the guy a chance and see where it goes or b, you don't give him a chance but you constantly think “What if?”. So, you choose a, only to find out he was just like the rest. Just when you are ready to get back into the game and give it your all, you see a blessing. Breaking up with my ex-Champ allowed me to focus on myself, which made me a better friend and student, more financially independent and lastly more confident within myself.

I physically met Manasseh Williams over 4 years ago at a church convention in Schaumburg, Illinois. I knew of him through his brother and I have been friends for almost 6 years now. The first time Manasseh walked up to me I did not even look in his direction because I was not too sure who he was, to me he was just a random guy till he told me his full name. I then realized who he was and instantly we became friends. That whole weekend we got closer and decided to keep in contact as we departed ways, me going to Iowa and him going to Minnesota. We talked on the phone all day and every night. We told each other everything, our deepest secrets and our fears. Months went by and we became so attached to each other we did not even realize that or the fact that we lived 3 hours away from each other. We gave each other nicknames that only we could understand, he was no longer Manasseh to me he was Champ. Me and Champ were so

much a like it was crazy. I told him my past and he vowed to never treat me like the others did and at first, he kept his promise. There were good days and bad, I never let the bad outweigh the good because what is a relationship without bad days? Once school started it felt like there were no more good days, there were bad days and days we wouldn't speak, that right there was the problem but I didn't think anything of it.

It was a few weeks after Champ came to visit me in Iowa, something was off. I was in bed twisting and turning and I could not sleep, my heart was heavy, but I knew I had to end it. I simply could not take any more sleepless nights crying and overthinking about Champ. Things were fine one minute and the next it felt like I was begging for communication. He became closed off, I became irritated and together we became toxic. Constantly arguing and ignoring each other for days, it was not like we could pull up on each other either, we were hours away from each other. I sat up with tears in my eyes, a massive headache and wrote the message "I can't continue being in this relationship, we're growing apart and as much as we try to make this work we can't" send. Once that message was sent, the tears stopped coming and it was like a weight was lifted off my shoulders.

Breaking up with Champ led me to strengthen my relationships with my friends and concentrate on being a better student. While I was dating Champ, I was that girl that was completely invested in my boyfriend that I never really paid attention to my friends like that. I think it was because I was so invested in his every free time that I would blow my friends off. Same with my grades. Since Champ wasn't always free, if I was studying at the moment and he was free I would stop studying just to talk to him because I wouldn't know when the next time, he would be free, would be. The bond I

now have with my friends and being able to attend school in Missouri are reasons why breaking up with Champ was the right thing to do.

When you get your heartbroken why not invest in yourself and make some money. After I broke up with Champ I began to work more, save up my money and spoil myself. While dating Champ I was working at a nursing home making around 13 dollars and hour, but I did not take my work seriously, I would mostly hide in the back or even the bathroom just constantly checking my phone to see if he had called or texted me. When we broke up I had so much free time and I did not want to be alone in my thought's that I decided to ask my manager for some more hours. After a while work became fun, I grew closer to my co workers who are know some of my best's friends. I was at work almost every day that I saved so much money that I had enough to pay my first few monthly payments and still shop and buy me and my friends some things. Getting my heart broken made me realize that distracting yourself with more important things helps you build yourself back up.

For females including me who are not a size 0 or look like society's image of a perfect girl, Champ made me more confident. He loved me for who I am and that was one thing I adored about him. But after we broke up it gave me the energy to work on myself and better my inner person as well. I took time to myself and catered to my needs. I meditated a lot, spiritually I grew closer to God. I did not have horrible acne, but I still cleared up my skin and I lost some weight. I changed not only how I carried myself but also how I looked at the world. My views on men and relationship changed from everything being a fairy tale to you can get your heartbroken faster than you even know. Being able to have strong confidence made me turn my whole life around for the better and be happier within myself.

Breaking up with my ex-Champ allowed me to focus on myself, which made me a better friend and student, more financially independent and lastly more confident within myself. The reason why this is so important to me is because I honestly thought he was the one, yes, I am young, but I've never felt the way I felt towards him towards anyone else. Honestly, I do not know what I would do differently for future relationships. I feel like everything happens for a reason and as Twyla Tharp once said "Ultimately there is no such thing as a failure. There are lessons learned in different ways." I would not look at this relationship as a regret, but as a lesson learned and knowledge gained that will help to strengthen future relationships.

Our Prisons

Da'Sha Roubideaux

By the age of fifteen, I moved back to my hometown St. Joseph from South Dakota. At the time I was devastated because it meant I was going to have to leave my one and only friend and move where I was going to have to attend a new school and have less privacy. During the spring semester of my freshman year in high school my mother decided it was best we move back to St. Joseph due to our financial concerns. For a while I stayed with my father and grandmother who I was never really around growing up because of my father being in and out of prison.

Between the ages of one and six I was still living in St. Joseph and close enough to my father to be able to visit him on a regular basis. It was the only way I was allowed to still have a bond with my father. My Grandma would pick me up from my mother's house in her grey 2004 Volkswagen Jetta every visiting day and we would drive approximately 2 hours out of town to the prison my father was incarcerated in. I loved visiting with my dad and didn't mind having to be under a prison guard's supervision because in that moment my excitement would distract me from it once we were in each other's presence. I was always the kind of kid who has switched schools many times and have been in many different living situations. After a while of moving around it became less of a priority to me to make friends and I became even more antisocial during my earlier younger years. Change was always normal to me and having to adapt to new environments. Although, I hated always trying to find the words to introduce myself on the first day if I was asked to before it would even be my turn and be nervous the entire time. Through it all, I've worked through my fears everyday since then and no longer get

nervous and have no issue with being alone if I have to but I don't mind having someone I can really connect with around.

When my mother decided to move my family back to South Dakota my relationship with my father had changed over the years of me not being able to see him. The drive would be not only two hours away but at least twelve hours away. As a child I thought to myself how I can't drive and my mother how my mother showed no interest in making the drive herself for me to see my father. My grandma was only getting older by every year and everything in her grew weaker. At this point in my life I could only wait for my dad to call me because I couldn't call him and write letters. Over the years I slowly adapted to this huge change in my life and how it's made it harder getting to know each other now has been for the both of us.

I remember my first time visiting my father in prison like it was yesterday but for a while it wasn't as clear to me as it is now. It was early Monday morning and I had woken up around eight to get ready to visit my father. My mother told me two days before that my grandma was taking me to see my father who I've only met once as a baby. She dressed me that day and made sure I was following the dress code. I remember how I stayed up all night thinking about how me and my father would interact with each other and if he would remember me because I for sure I didn't remember him. My grandma arrived earlier than she said to pick me up and I was more than ready. She strapped me in the car and shared a few words with my mother prior to what time we'll be back and if I needed to eat breakfast.

After driving for two hours and arriving at the gates of the facility I remembered asking my grandma what kind of place this was and being scared to walk through the entrance, through the metal detectors, and all the way to the end towards the tall, stern

looking prison guards. My grandma continued to put her clear bag through a CT scanner, which at the time, I thought was an x-ray machine. I was only required to walk through a metal detector because I was only a child. My Grandma signed us and the lady at the front desk told us to have a seat and wait until called upon. We made our way to the soft-colored metal chairs attached to the bars on the walls and the loud noises of the heavy metal doors closing caused me to jump and the coldness of the waiting room didn't ease my mind in any way. I grew more anxious waiting and even more when the woman called my grandmother's name. We both stood up at the same time and walked with the guards towards the elevator. I was always scared of elevators until I started visiting my father more frequently and got used to it over time. This elevator was old and made me feel like it was going to break down as soon as we all stepped foot in it. We walked down this long hallway for at least five minutes until we came to a stop at these heavy double doors.

I was finally going to see my father again after years of only phone calls ,pictures and letters. I appreciated how he still managed to send me gifts on my birthday and holidays. I stood still in front of the doors and thought to myself how I was finally going to see my father again. He was right on the other side of this door and not twelve hours away anymore. At this moment I never had to think about what I was going to first say to my father because I already knew. When the guards opened the doors and guided us all the way to the visiting room, we slowly followed behind them and I was only thinking about how my father will look now and if he remembers me because I barely remembered him.

As soon as we entered the visitation room I instantly took in consideration of everyone around me and wondered what their stories were. I became very observant of

my surroundings in this very large place. I was curious to know everyone's situations. The guards, the inmates and their visitors. Then I thought about how some could possibly be innocent and how the ones who are guilty, either live the rest of their lives in shame everyday or have no remorse for their actions at all. This was a time in their lives where they only had time, the time to think about what would be next? What they could've done differently, and where they would be pursuing in life but can't because of being incarcerated.

We were led all the way to the back left corner of the room where the play area was for the children. I immediately identified my father sitting across the black bookcase filled with board games and books. It came to my attention how I didn't have any issue knowing it was him because of how much he hasn't changed since every picture I've seen him in and I instantly ran into his arms. I remember him asking me if I knew who he was and replying back with a smart tone. "Of course I remember my own father, how could I forget you?" He smiled at me, we talked, and played board games for as long as we were allowed too. I tried not to think about having to leave and always tried to enjoy the moment but It made it hard too knowing it would soon be over.

My perspectives on life changed dramatically, as I continued to visit my father in prison. Over the years our bond only grew stronger and it made it harder for me to say goodbye everytime I left from visiting him and it was even worse when I turned ten and moved out of state. As I grew older I got used to being away from my father. Our relationship remained the same hours away from each other and we talked on the phone as much as possible.

When my father was released from prison, I just turned thirteen and my mom made me move back to Missouri to stay with him and my grandma. At the time I was

against this because I didn't want to move away from my best friend and I knew my living arrangements would change in a way that was going to take longer than usual for me to get used to. Unfortunately, I didn't get to have my own room. I shared with my younger cousin. She was at least 5 at the time and was just as sassy as me. My grandma played favorites and for some reason I never got the chance to be her favorite. My father and I had never lived under the same roof before in my entire life and our relationship changed, we bumped heads more often and my smart mouth and his temper didn't match. Today things between us are better and we have both improved in many areas. Gaining each other's trust again and communicating is everything and that's all what we really needed to do.

Becoming a Better Me, Without You

Teaghen Schraufek-Forshee

Whether we realize it or not, we are all influenced and shaped by our past experiences. An event from my past that's had a major impact on me is parent's divorce. This event was followed by a lot of very impactful and low times of my life that were very important in the growth in becoming the person I am today. Growing up, I always just lived with my mom and younger sister because my dad's job with storm clean up and construction required him to travel to wherever he was needed, so he wasn't home often. When I was in 7th grade, my dad finally got a job close to home and lived with us. Everything was going pretty good until that October my 8th grade year then it all started going downhill from there. The consequences that came along with my parent's divorce was an absent father followed by my depression which helped form the person I am today.

It was just a typical night at home, I don't really remember what happened moments before for the following events to occur, but this is what I remember and witnessed the night my parent's marriage ended. I heard yelling coming from my mom upstairs. My dad had his hands wrapped around my mom's wrists as she's trying to break from his grip. I was confused about what was happening and had no idea what to do. Once my dad let go of her, all I remember is her walking out the front door saying something, but the only words out of her mouth that I remember and stuck with me were, "You guys are better off without me, I'm better off dead".

After I heard those words and saw that door shut, I've never been so scared in my life. I didn't know where she was going, what she was going to do, or if I was ever going

to see my mom or anyone from her family again. I felt helpless and useless, I didn't know what to do. My dad didn't really make much of an effort to help comfort my sister and I when my mom just walked out of the house and left, he just talked down about my mom, making her sound bad. About 30 minutes had passed, the next thing I remember is the police showed up and my uncle showed up with my mom. My dad is talking to the police and wants my sister and I to talk to them and is trying to turn us against our mom. My uncle talks to me reminding us how much our mom has done for us and how much my dad has been around. I didn't want to talk to the officers, I was just scared and didn't want anything to happen to my mom and didn't want my dad to take us from her. Everything's a blur after that, all I remember is my dad taking his stuff and leaving that night. After that, the next few months, I would see him every other weekend for a few hours until my parent's divorce was official and he got a job down south. After those factors occurred, I went from living with my dad and seeing him every day to seeing him a few hours every other weekend to seeing him a few hours once a year. Rarely seeing or hearing from my dad had a huge impact on me, but I wouldn't show it.

Growing up, my dad was often gone working out of state. This wasn't as hard on me when I was younger because he'd call every night and show up randomly and always be home on our birthdays, holidays, my sports games, or school events. Nowadays, since I am older, have a job and work 40 hours a week, go to college, and have a whole life that he knows nothing about or gets to experience with me like my mom. He will text me good morning and goodnight every few days. I have to put the effort in to call him, otherwise he will call me every now and then, but as the dad, I feel he should be trying more to call and have an interest in my life. I find it very hard to call him and have a conversation because I rarely talk to or see him now. I see him once a year, most of the

time at the end of year around Christmas, but I don't spend holidays or birthdays with him. I haven't spent one of those with him since I was in 8th grade. I feel like he barely knows me, or I barely know him like little things a parent should know about their child. My dad keeps his personal life a secret from me like we aren't father and daughter. It hurts a lot that we seem like strangers and feels like I don't even have a dad. When I think of having a dad, I think of movies where the father doesn't want his little girl to grow up and is very protective of her. My dad completely missed me growing up. I change every time he sees me and he changes everytime I see him. Each time, I hardly recognize him from the year before. My dad doesn't know enough about my life to be protective. My mom is the closest thing I have to a "protective dad". I have always imagined what it'd be like to have a dad like in the movies, or even like my friends' dads. I am beyond jealous of them for having such a beautiful relationship with their dad, but that seems so impossible for me. He's completely ruined that for me by completely breaking my heart. Your father is supposed to be your first love, not your first heartbreak.

During my sophomore year, my depression began getting really bad and took a turn for the worst. My first boyfriend, my first love, had just broken up with me. I began to lose friends because I would get upset with them about stupid or little things. It was really easy for me to cut people off. I didn't have a lot of friends and had a few short term boyfriends that were very toxic and took different pieces of me. I thought having a boyfriend would make me feel loved and better about myself and fill my missing piece from my dad not being around. I had completely lost my faith and fell off my path from God. I would find myself laying in bed often and never doing anything to get out of the

house. I would find myself crying all the time and never having a reason why. I felt numb and empty and just felt me dying inside. I had no hope and just

constantly felt this pain and emptiness in my chest. I lost all motivation and hope. All I wanted to do is lay in bed and sleep so I didn't have to feel this way. I didn't want to talk to anyone about how I felt because I was scared and I just wanted to be left alone. This is when I knew I had hit my lowest point.

My parent's divorce, my absent dad, and my depression have been a major factor in my growth in becoming who I am today. Due to my absent dad and depression I have very high anxiety and struggle with it every day, I am still trying to learn to cope with it. I am afraid of relationships and letting my guard down. I hate this, but I just am tired of being hurt and let down by people, or just made feel self conscious. I find it hard to trust and talk to people about things. I just prefer to keep everything to myself because I feel like no one gets it and doesn't communicate with me much about it. No one really ever knows what to say to me. I am very self conscious and insecure about my personality. This has caused me to have a hard time being myself around new people. Not all bad things have come from these factors, there is also some good that has come from these. They have helped me find my faith grow stronger in it. The absence of my dad has made me strong and independent and showed me how to be brave. God gives the hardest things to his strongest children is what I learned. I try my best in everything and this is helping me to work on my confidence and learning to love and accept my insecurities. I've recently met some amazing friends and teachers who have been a big part in helping me with these things too. My dad not being a big part in my life has made me a stronger and better person. I don't think I would like the person I would have been if he was around more involved in my life. He's not someone I would look up to, or want to be

like, but because of him not being the best dad, I am who I am today and I love who I've become.

The consequences that came along with my parent's divorce was an absent father followed by my depression which helped form the person I am today. My parent's divorce had a big impact on me because it resulted in my dad learning and not being in my life which caused my depression. I honestly don't know who I am or where I would be today if these events had never occurred. The the absence of my dad is something I still have a hard time with every day. I want a good relationship with him because I often feel like I never even had a dad, but after everything he's put me through and talks about my problems like they aren't real, it makes it seem impossible and is extremely difficult when he doesn't put as much effort as he should as my dad. Always look for the good in your trauma, no matter how bad. Everything happens for a reason. Try To reach out to the source of the problem. For example, I try to call my dad once a week and try mentioning him coming up to visit and informing him about things in my life. I have a tattoo on my forearms of the Bible verse Romans 8:18 which means "The pain you have been feeling doesn't compare to the joy that is coming" as a reminder that good things come after the rough times. Things may be hard, but good things are yet to come.

The Cabin

Kaylie Stams

Have you ever wanted to get away from life and experience yourself? Figure out who you were, who you are? Four people, a cabin in the mountains, beautiful surroundings and good company will allow you to do just that. My grandparents, my cousin and I took a two week trip to Milwaukee, Wisconsin to get away from everything happening in our lives at home. During these two weeks spent at the cabin I would reconnect with myself and see me for me, a girl who loved everyone and lost her way but found it once again with the help from the outdoors and some compassion from others, and be able to breathe without feeling trapped.

We went to this cabin to get away from everything and from all the arguing that had surrounded us for months. I just so happened to get thrown in the middle of the arguing between my grandparents and my dad. I had been in the atmosphere of arguing and fighting for too long, I began to turn into a hateful person. I was irritable, unwilling to reason and hateful, very, very hateful. I was someone I didn't recognize. This scared me more than anything.

The cabin was in Wisconsin, Milwaukee to be exact. I loved the idea of going to the mountains. The chance to experience something I had never before. The cabin was about a mile from civilization. This wasn't a bad thing. We needed the distance. The cabin was old and built by someone I had never met. This place had a hidden beauty about it and I was there to find it. Maybe in finding the cabin's beauty, I'd find my own.

We had arrived. This cabin had a huge distinctive feature about it, the roof. The roof was a triangle at one end and a dome on the back half with a balcony that wrapped

around the upper level. The dome I would later find opened up to an observatory type area, looking at the stars from there was magical. I only ever spent one night there, because I used the balcony for most of my gazing. The entrance was oak wood with birch wood trim on the inside. The smell, oh the smell of oak and birch wood wafting throughout the whole cabin, surrounding me in a breath of fresh air. The doors, double wide, opened up into a luxurious living room with a beautiful chandelier made of deer antlers and hanging bulbs. From the living room a small hall divided that room from the kitchen whose fixtures were all a smokey grey color with marble countertops, a huge island in the middle of the room and a beautiful bay window just above the sink. I remember walking up the oak stairs to the upper level and choosing the bigger room, making my cousin jealous. My room had a queen size bed with a beautiful dark oak frame and a black fur carpet at the edge of the bed. I had the balcony, the place I'd spend my mornings and nights. I had a wonderful private bath with marble floors and black stained vanity with an open sink. I sat my bags down and began unpacking and putting my clothes in the oak dresser. I headed downstairs to help the rest unpack.

We all sat at the fireplace, with the black with white trim on the mantle, after dinner every night, which allowed us to open up about the worries at home, all the arguing and our past. I remember it was the first night. Friday. My grandparents had never heard the full extent of what my mother had done. The logs on the fire crackled and tiny embers flew up as I spoke and with each word it seemed the heat from the fire grew thus making it hotter and hotter almost as if I was being thrown in the fire. Mentally it felt like that. My grandparents sat speechless after I told them the whole story. My mother had abused me for two years straight and no one knew because I never said anything out of fear. It was the third night and once again we were at the fireplace

ready to chat, fireside chats we called them. I explained how even though I went through all the abuse, I was able to see that it wasn't right and that I was stronger. Saying all this to them made me realize that the person I was was almost the same as my mother. I hated it! I wasn't abusive but the attitude and irritability made for a dangerous combo. This was only the first step in discovering myself.

My room has a balcony, the balcony of truth. The smell of the outdoors always smelled of cold, brisk wind with a hint of pine and evergreen from the trees that surrounded us. Every morning and night I would go out on this balcony and write in a blue and white leather journal with my black ink, ballpoint pen. I wrote things like "One day I'll have courage to say this." "You are strong, brave, beautiful and smart. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise." When writing all these things on this balcony in Wisconsin in a cabin for two weeks I realized that I am more than I give myself credit for. I turned into someone I didn't know anymore. Writing was an escape, seeing nature was an escape. Sitting on that balcony with its rough cedar edges and oak railings made it impossible to not be inspired, as it had been through weather and years of use and it still stood strong. This allowed me to see, even though it does sound stupid, I can be like the balcony and still stand after years of weather, in this case abuse. This was when I started to really realize who I was and who I needed to be for me.

I love nature and being out in it was something special for me. While we were at the cabin my cousin and I would take these hikes we called "head clearing hikes". We hiked a total of eight times on the mountain, Sadly, I cannot recall the name of the mountain, but the view was amazing. The smells of grass and moss, the rocks and dirt underneath our feet was soft and smelled of hope. My cousin had always been someone who did everything for other people, I was no exception. Every hike we went on we

would talk and listen to the birds and animals of the trail. Mainly I talked about the struggle of hiding my emotions and how I couldn't open up due to the feeling of being a disappointment. I remember the distinct sound of a bird that we saw everyday. It was almost as if it was saying hi to us. We vented to each other mainly about the arguing and how it was stupid and pointless. I vented about my feelings, mainly the ones I couldn't understand. Like not feeling like I was in my own body, how I didn't know who I was. These hikes, at the cabin, were another step to me realizing who I was. They allowed me to slip away for a moment to really take the time and find the problems in myself, in my life that made me irritable and upset.

I went home after two weeks with a refreshed, brand new, open mind. I changed from the cabin. I found who I was. I was a girl who had let people decide things for her. I never let anyone in. I hid my emotions. I came back from the place and spoke for myself. I told people what I thought of the ridiculous arguing. How silly it was to make a rift in our family. I was a new person. No longer was I that hateful, irritated girl. I was reborn as a loving, caring, self spoken person.

The cabin in Milwaukee, Wisconsin as great as it was, was more of a place for me to find myself and I did, in the two weeks we were there I discovered the root of the problem. I allowed myself to open up, to speak out about my problem. From leaving to get away, fireside chats, the balcony of truth, long hikes to finally finding myself. There was one thing, the most important thing, I found myself, I knew who I was from that moment on.

My Dark Scary Void of Dream

Alloura Stevens

Feeling empty is a strange and uncomfortable sensation. That is how I felt in the days leading up to the funeral. It was like a deep vast void of darkness swallowed me whole. I remember standing there at seven years old, feeling nothing. Then, after the funeral, a whole wave of emotion crashed down upon me. It finally hit me. He was gone forever, and it was all my fault.

I would relive that moment for the rest of my life. I would wake in the middle of the night screaming bloody murder, shaking, and sweating beyond belief. I believe I had one of those night terrors the night before he died. That night as I slept in my parents' bed, I had dreamt of something sinister like the darkness had taken over me. I saw a scene play out in front of me. My father was lying on the floor in front of the bedroom door like he might have just come out of the bathroom like he had been getting ready for work. He laid there so peaceful and still for what felt like several hours. It did not take me long to realize something was wrong and I should get help. No matter what I did, I could not get my body to move. It was like I had been paralyzed, forced to watch him there. Finally, after I had awoken from my horrible dream, I could hear the sirens and all the surroundings talking. The unthinkable had happened. I subsumed my emotions, crying as every little girl would after being told "daddy is dead" when the doctors came out. I cried in my grandfather's arms for what felt like a lifetime. I tried hard to forget the horrid dream, but it would come back to haunt me for many years to come.

In the blink of an eye, life can change course in a very unexpected way. My life changed drastically. I was thrown into a new home, town, and school shortly after my father died. As a small child, I did not forget he was gone, but I kept living. I felt a lot of anger at my mother when she remarried almost exactly a year after my father's death. The man she married got her into drugs, which caused a lot of abuse to ensue. This is about the time I became depressed and missed my small, perfect family. I could not help but notice the kids at my school with their moms and dads, which made me feel hatred towards them. That envious pull towards them that made me stare at them, hoping to find the answers I longed for. I tried to guess what they had that I did not. During this time, I hated a lot, especially "god". To this day, I am not a big believer in him or his presence. If he really did exist, why did he let my father die, then put me into the position to be abused and neglected. I also no longer have that hatred towards people who have that idea of the perfect family. My family is still very broken, but even after all this time away, sometimes the emotional abuse still shows through. My mother still thinks to this day that she needed to remarry for "love" because having her children love her was not enough. I still suffer from high functioning anxiety, but the depression is thankfully gone.

I am still here, standing. My past did not bring me down but made me emphatic. I believe my past led me to help others around me. Such as why I want a job in making sure those around me are not abused and neglected. When a friend of mine lost his father, I could comfort him and get an idea of what he is feeling. As a friend who has lost mine, I knew he probably did not want to hear that it was all okay. I knew the struggle he was facing and just how it could affect him. I also could help several other

friends who were going through hard times over the years. I could always stand by their side. Overall, I did not let my past destroy me, instead, I let it build me up into the person I am today.

My dark and scary void dream changed me. I now know that it was not my fault but just a scary dream. Children have scary dreams all the time, but mine impacted me. I went from a happy little girl with this great family to a depressed and scared preteen and I have now grown up into the young adult we see today. The young adult wants to change the world for the better and help those around me. I live by my favorite greys anatomy quote, “It is important to tell people how much you love them while they can still hear you. Because in the blink of an eye, life can change course, and who knows who will stand next to you, or who you will lose. You only live once.”

Remembering Mama

Grace Szesny

If I would've known that was the last Christmas I spent with my mom I would've stayed longer, hugged her a little tighter, told her how much she means to me, and enjoyed her presence more. I'll never forget that morning I came to her house. She was so happy to see me and my boyfriend. We sat and talked for a bit and I gave her a gift. She was totally obsessed with oil lamps and candles. I went to Wamart and found a lamp for \$9.99 and a candle for \$5.00. When she opened her gift the amount of excitement that was shown on her face was priceless. She never cared about money, or the price of items, she enjoyed family and that itself speaks volumes about my mom. I can still smell her perfume and feel her hug as if she was holding me now. She loved the perfume "Woman" that she would buy from Walmart, though she never knew why they took it off the shelves, she always found a way to get a hold of one. She always smelled so good, she smelled like home. It's difficult to describe the way her smell gave me a sense of safety, the way she made me feel that I was exactly where I needed to be.

Just like most teenagers my mom and I didn't always see eye to eye, but at the end of the day she was guaranteed to be the person I'd run to for help. She was my best friend. When I was 14 I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and she was the only person by my side the entire time. None of my family checked on me, no one came to visit when I was in the hospital for weeks at a time. My mom stuck by me, and made sure I never felt alone. Sadly I was never able to return the favor and now I regret everyday that I wasn't there when she needed me most.

My mom hasn't ever had an easy life, she actually used to joke around and say our family was "cursed", at least I thought it was a joke at the time. She lost both of her brothers and her mom within a year, she never met her dad or knew who he was, and she's always been in an abusive relationship. Those things plus many others made my mom severely depressed. Nothing could ever make her happy and some days it was hard to pull her out of bed. January 17th, 2019, my mom called me to discuss her upcoming surgery, gastric bypass. This is beneficial if your weight causes problems with your health. She was so excited and ready for a new change. She spoke very positively and looked forward to the future. For the longest time though, I had a weird feeling about this surgery. I did not agree with my mom about having it. In fact, I tried to talk her out of it multiple times up to this day. This phone call was the first time I had ever heard my mom so excited about the future and actually looking forward to something for a change. After hearing her so happy, I finally approved. Not for the sake of myself, but for the sake of my mom. I wished her luck on her surgery the next morning and told her I'd call her after I got out of school.

Unfortunately, my intuition was not wrong and a phone call would soon prove this. The next day, 9:21 am, I received a phone call from my brother. I had a terrible feeling that something was wrong so I answered. My brother, balling his eyes out, could barely get a word out before screaming, "Mom is dead! Gracie, Mom is dead!" I thought he had a bad dream so I tried to talk to him more and ask him what he was talking about. He then replied, "I am on my way to her house, she passed away in her sleep. I have to go, I will call you when I get there. I love you," before he hung up the phone. I sat in bed and stared, trying to think, but couldn't process the words that came out of his mouth. My boyfriend asked me if everything was okay and I began to cry uncontrollably

and say, “How could this happen? She was perfectly fine, I knew this surgery was a bad idea.”

I tried to have a normal day, I didn’t want to think about what the reality was. I thought going to work would make me calm, and settle my nerves. On my way to work I silently cried the entire way while my boyfriend drove me. As we arrive I wiped my cold tears and my boyfriend looks me in the eyes and said “Grace, hunny, you don’t have to do this. We can go back home.” I told him I was fine, as a tear ran off my chin and onto my jacket. He kissed me on the cheek and I got out of the truck. I opened the door to the restaurant and I started balling, a terrible cry I have never heard before. It was a cry of heartbreak, a cry of pain. I went to the bathroom in hopes to calm down and my friend/coworker came in there to see what was wrong. I said “Tres my mom is gone, she is dead” and I became so numb that I fell to the ground and could not get up. She helps me calm down and hugs me tight. She walked me to my manager's office where I had to explain the situation again. She asked me if I needed to go home and I told her I would be fine. I just needed a minute to breathe and process everything. She assured me that I could go home anytime and they would be fine without me. I explained that I needed to work in hopes it would take my mind off of things. I took my first table of the day and I was a complete mess, I couldn’t stop crying. I am sure they thought I was insane. I then considered going home. I called my boyfriend and packed up my things. When I got home I finally got a hold of my brother who had calmed down enough to where I can understand him. He explained to me what was going on and what we needed to do at the moment. Even though I tried to live like nothing happened, I couldn’t.

I had to mourn throughout the next few days, which made it very difficult to work with my family while still shocked myself. My sister, brother and I had planned to meet

at my sister's house for dinner and to talk about our plans for how we will lay my mom to rest. We all agreed that my mom wanted to be cremated so that is what we did. The rest of the ideas they had were not realistic, those two are not the smartest nor a least bit responsible. Basically what I had gotten out of that meeting was for my mom to be cremated, the rest was my problem apparently. The next day I had to make phone calls to see where my mom was, and what funeral home I needed to go to to plan the funeral. The funeral home already had a meeting set up with her husband so I made a call to make sure he was okay that I attended the meeting with him.

The day of her funeral it hadn't hit me what I was getting ready for. I don't think I mentally prepared myself enough for what I was going to walk into. As I arrived I saw my mom's most favorite portrait of herself (her senior picture) on a huge blown up poster that also listed her year of birth and death. When I saw that my heart sunk to the bottom of my chest and tears poured out of my eyes. The memorial had begun and as I looked around and noticed the gap between my "family" and where I was sitting. If it wasn't for my friends coming to support me during this time I wouldn't have had anyone. As we listened to the music play, and heard the sorrow from people around us. My 5 year old nephew Patty tugged on my shoulder and whispered "Aunt Grace can I dance for my nanny". I mean how could I say no? He got up and began "flossing" he calls it his fornite dance. The whole room lit up with smiles and laughter. We all felt the presence of my mom during this time. It felt warm, it felt normal again. After the preacher said some words he asked if anyone would like to come up. My sister went first, then I did. I'm not into public speaking so instead of speaking about my mom I spoke to her. I could barely get words out because my heart was shattering as I stood there. After I sat back down my dad stood up and walked to the front. I was honestly

scared for him to go up and talk about a woman who he has never gotten along with for years. He had told the story of how they met. Which I have never heard before. He spoke so fondly about my mom and you could tell that he was heartbroken when he said “ It should’ve been my turn, not hers” I think that was the hardest part. Hearing my father say those words, why did he think it should’ve been him? I truly believe to this day my dad was in love with my mom. He is heartbroken, and misses his best friend. I’ve noticed a huge change in my father’s frame of mind. He hasn’t been himself since that day.

To this day I still feel the same pain as I did the day I found out. I get told often that things will get better and I need to give it time. I just don’t know when that time will be. I find myself talking to her just to give her an update on how life is down here. She always told me how beautiful I was and made sure I knew how proud she was of me . Even though she is not with us today she is with us in spirit. She showed everyone love and was always kind no matter who you were or what you did. She was the person who went out of her way to ask how your day was or if you needed anything. That’s the person I will always look up to even when days are tough. I will always strive to be half the woman my mom was.

-Rest your beautiful soul mama. xoxo

The familiar unknown

Isaac Twombly

There is a place that for many folks brings them back to a specific time or emotion or more innocent perspective. This place steeped in memory, the essence of moments stopped in time. This place for me is the old family farm where my Grandparents had lived since before anyone still living could remember. These places even if not ads they had been still hold the memories of the lives lived on its back. To return to the farm is to regain that feeling of the world being small, of life through the eyes of your more innocent self.

After World War Two, Grandpa wanted to return to his farming roots and to his home in Northwest Missouri near a small farming community named Arko. My uncles had grown up in a house that had been there long before my Grandparents bought the land in the early forties. The raising and selling of horses was the trade of their family to moderate success. The house I knew growing up had been built in the sixties and was the house my mother had been raised in.

It takes about an hour to drive up to the farm. Driving through rural Missouri the sense of things being as they always had been is strong. The old rough gravel road had always been full of holes and ruts. That barn had always been there. That cemetery with graves from the eighteen sixties, that grave where Grandma now rests. That cemetery where my parents took their wedding photos. That cemetery I sometimes like to come to and sit next to Grandma and just let time pass us by. You had to go by the cemetery to turn onto the driveway. Going down the drive to where the house and barns had been I could see the changes time brings.

After the death of my Grandparents much of the land had been tamed by the farmers we rented the land to. Trees cut down, ponds filled in and barns that the Amish helped Grandpa build in the forties demolished. Walking across the still unsettled earth where in my mind the house was still there. Looking around recreating the treeline that had bordered the property on all sides, refilling the swimming holes that had peppered some of our land and most of the surrounding territory, and placing the old barns back where they belonged. What was now fields of beans had been a ranch full of horses. Grandpa had been proud of these horses. “Good stock, those Arabians,” he would often say. Though I had never seen them, those pictures of strong horse’s tails held high in the air left a clear image of that mighty herd. That wild spirit clung to those rolling hills of bean stock just starting to produce.

Under those beans had been grass cut to exact precision by Grandpa. I remember Grandpa teaching me how to cut lawn on his 1993 Honda riding lawn mower. “Look there boy”, he would say pointing out at the grass, “You see that? That is the enemy army and this is your bomber plane.” He explained to me how to drop the bombs (the blade) and that if I did it right it would take a week or so for the hostile grass forces to dig themselves out. That grass is gone now, turned over with a massive tiller and replaced with neat rows of beans. As the land had been turned into a working farm, displacing much of what it had been, in so doing maximizing the potential of the land. Still it was the same in my mind, it was enough that it had been for me to remember, for the land to remember.

The last time I went to the farm was in 2018 just after the house had been meticulously disassembled by an Amish man wanting to rebuild it for his daughter. That house where I spent so many halloween nights, scared of werewolves and ghosts I knew

were stocking around in the night. The time I spent two weeks with Grandma cooking and washing dishes, listening to Grandpa reading his Louis L'amour book. Seeing the house removed, transplanted somewhere else, warped time there. That house was still there and not there, all that had happened here every one of those moments occurred simultaneously in my mind and brought with it a sense of peace. It's an odd feeling, the absence of familiarity in a familiar place. This is the place I knew though not as it had been. The essence remains, still making it feel like the world is small. To feel like the greatest threat is grass. It is here I was a child and still I see this place through those eyes. The farm had known me as an innocent lad and still maintains that idea of me.

This place exists for many people and to return to that place even if changed, brings those feelings, thoughts and fears back through memory to be experienced again. To see the farm and remember how I saw the world in my youth and how I see it now.

The Surprise of a Lifetime

Jillian Withrow

Have you ever heard the most important woman in your life say she didn't want to be alive anymore? When I was in high school my grandma was diagnosed with cancer and it was going to be hard for the next few months and we did not know if she would survive. I look up to her and she is my inspiration. I don't know what I would've done without her. When grandma was diagnosed with cancer, it wasn't just her life that changed; my life changed as well because almost losing the person I love most taught me how to overcome difficulties.

My grandmother is my inspiration and the woman I aspire to be like. Mamaw is the brightest light in the room and knows how to put a smile on your face. She's the strongest person I've ever met, despite all of her financial troubles she would always put her grandkids first. When my grandpa died my grandma lost her source of income that puts a heavy weight on her shoulders. At the time she had bills to pay at home but also the medical/ funeral expenses of my grandpa. Her only source of income at the time was a paycheck for cleaning the church we attended. She eventually got caught up on bills and barley makes enough money now to live a comfortable life. Whenever they needed money or they needed something she didn't care about what she needed she cared about us. Because of her I'm a girl I am today every Sunday she would gather up all of her grandkids and go to church. Every Saturday night all of us eleven grandkids made it a tradition to stay the night with our Mamaw. All of us would wake up Sunday morning and get all dolled up for church, and of course, we all matched. We would go to church and participate in all of our classes. Once church ended our day with Mamaw was not

over yet. All of us grandkids pile up in her car and head back to her house and have a home-cooked lunch, and spend the rest of the day with her until we had to go home. Mamaw hated missing Church. We were there every Sunday and you could see the joy on her face as we sat there learning about the Lord.

All my grandma would do is stay in bed and that's how we knew we had to take action and take her to the hospital. Everything was going great until she became sick and we didn't know what was wrong with her. Everyone in the family thought it was a cold, but it kept on getting worse so we knew that was out the window. Seeing her like this in pain and not knowing what was causing it pained me. I never thought in my life I would see her like that and there was nothing I could do to fix it. All I could do was stand by her side and hold her hand. She didn't want to go to the hospital because she didn't have the money to pay the medical bills and she did not have health insurance. We knew something was up when she started skipping Church. She would go when she was sick all the time but she didn't have the energy anymore.

One summer night in June, my mom called my uncle to take her to the emergency room while my mom and I went to my sister's dance recital. I was at the beautiful Missouri theater watching my sister dance across the stage when I was told my grandmother had been diagnosed with cancer. I was devastated. My sister and I were forced to go home late at night when all we wanted was to see our Mamaw. She was our hero, our Escape, we would run to her when we needed a break from life and we thought we lost our Escape. I couldn't eat nor sleep at night. I just felt sick. The next day we made our phone trip to the hospital where it took hours to get to. I walked in and I immediately burst into tears. My grandma looks like plastic top wires everywhere she couldn't even breathe on her own. The room was dark cold but my grandma was the

light even though she didn't feel like it she will always be my light. What she felt like was unbearable and I wished it was me going through the pain instead because she did not deserve this.

The pain got into her head to the point where she didn't want to live anymore. Do you know how it feels when your favorite person in the world says she doesn't want to live anymore? I wanted to break down crying, but I didn't. I stood tall, I stayed strong and I gave her hope. I gave her a reason to stay with not only me but the rest of my family. I wanted to blame God for letting this happen to her, but I knew I could not blame Him. Everything happens for a reason and I knew in my heart that a lesson was being taught to not only my grandma but to everyone around her. I learned to be patient, calm, and I learned to understand what happens around me because tomorrow is not promised. So while she was in the hospital I took over. I got up every Sunday and rounded up my cousins for church. I took notes to bring back to her because I knew how much she missed it. The happiness on her face when she saw me do this took away my pain because I knew she would fight for us. I knew she would be okay.

She's been getting treated and things have been looking up. I remember visiting and she slowly started getting better and better. I would walk in and her face would light up along with my other cousins and once again she was light. She was still in the hospital through the following year and she was missing home. most of all she missed being with all of her family at the same time she missed going to church seeing her friends learning about the Lord but soon enough she was able to do all of that again. It was February of the following year and everybody she loved and that loved her stood by her side through the whole thing never giving up on her. Most importantly my grandma never gave up.

Having my grandma be diagnosed with cancer has not only changed her but it's changed me. I learned how to understand the difficulties, and almost lost the person I loved the most. This was a reminder to me that life is short. Make sure you spend as much time with your family as possible. Life is unpredictable.

My Small-Town Home

Randall Wood

I have lived in many places from here in Saint Joseph, Missouri, all the way South to Dallas, Texas. Most of my upbringing though was not far from here though in Stewartsville, Missouri. A very small town. So small they have not changed the population sign in more than twenty years. But, being raised in such a small town like that has had its advantages as well as some disadvantages. On one hand you get an amazing education if you are lucky enough to get a school with dedicated teachers. You got the sense of community and that “All American” vibe in this town. Then you get the other hand which is stuck in a time from years ago where girls and boys were expected to act a certain way and do certain things. I have a love hate relationship with this place. I love the community and the feeling of home I still get from it, but I also hate how the town gets stuck in backwards overly conservative beliefs. I was driven to fight those beliefs I had seen as unfair because I wanted to see change and hope for any future kid or teen that wanted to do something that was not the norm as I did.

Stewartsville is an extremely quiet place. In warmer spring and summer months you hear the constant sound of lawn mowers and smell the fresh smell of cut grass all day. You see most yards groomed to perfection with multiple types of flowers so vibrant you would think they were glowing. It is a type of town that once you were ten or eleven you could be free to ride your bike with friends everywhere as long as you stayed in city limits and did not go on the highway. You would ride by a passing car and wave and knew whoever was driving by would usually always wave back. My own friends and I

would ride our bikes everywhere. I can remember once we got older and could ride out on the gravel roads a little outside of town, we found this little patch of heaven along the creek. It was like our own little private beach. Sand lined the edge of the water, and the water was so clear you could see right through it. We would not dare swim there, but it was so beautiful. We rode up every weekend in warmer weather to get a little sun. Places like this are rare unless you live somewhere like Stewartsville. Everybody knows everybody and it is the sincerest sense of community I have felt so far in life.

You are honestly blessed to be raised through early school years in a town like Stewartsville, because you get a more developed education in a community that cares if you succeed. That never really was clear to me until I was in middle school. I had cousins in larger schools and they were always having issues and needing tutors and I did not understand that because they live in a large city they do not get the one on one learning as often if ever. Growing up in a K-12 school with less than 300 students in the entire school really made it easier to get to ask more questions and have your teacher break things down whenever necessary. The teachers at Stewartsville C-2 are amazingly dedicated. One example of this was at the beginning of my Junior year in my math class. I was doing horrible with the material we were learning and my teacher, Mrs. Griffon, noticed this. After two failed attempts at a major test she told me to see her after school. I still remember walking in on the old squeaky wooden floor in that small second story room. Small but so bright because of the floor to ceiling windows. The back of the room had a fire escape door with a bright red sign that read, "WARNING ALARM WILL SOUND!" She pulled one of those older pale red chairs with the cream-colored desk fixed to it up beside her desk. We sat there for around an hour to show me why and how

I kept messing up. It was so helpful because I was corrected in the steps that I was forgetting which is what I was not understanding the entire time. Stewartsville C-2 has many teachers just like Mrs. Griffon that want to see everyone succeed. The town itself is full of people too that want nothing more than to see younger generations succeed to keep the amazing community going for years to come.

Our school was very small but to me growing up it was huge. When you enter, the double doors open to a long hallway with trophy cases and past Senior class portraits on the wall. You pass by the computer lab, library, and science lab. At the end of the long hallway you enter the school lobby where you find the Superintendent's office and the entry to the gym. I always remember during lock-ins we would have sock races down the wheelchair ramp in the lobby, and I almost broke my arm doing so. When I was enrolled at Stewartsville High School I witnessed my father, who was our middle school 9th and 10th grade English teacher, fight to abolish the "zero" policy and had the school adopt a "no student left behind" policy. That is how all the teachers wanted it to be though because they wanted nothing but success for us. Because of this we saw higher standardized state testing scores, making Stewartsville C-2 a Missouri Gold Star School from my 8th grade year through my Junior year when I left for Dallas, TX. Being lucky to attend a school in a community like this helped shape me into the man I am today. Somebody who is caring, community oriented, and proud to speak up for something I believe in.

The biggest issue with a town like this is they are stuck in a time where beliefs and traditional ideas were vastly different. And me being the "out" person I was, meaning I was openly gay, I of course wanted to challenge those beliefs. My being "out"

was not even the issue. It was when I wanted to challenge the status quo of the school's history that everyone seemed to have an issue with. Spring of my 8th grade year meant Varsity Cheer Tryouts for my Freshman year were coming up. In middle school I had helped "manage" the Junior High Cheerleaders. I would help at pep assemblies and games with their music and carry their pom bag and signage. This made me honestly fall in love with the sport, so I decided I was trying out. I signed up and the office assistant had made a comment that I was not allowed to try out due to being a boy. I was hurt and accepted this for a day or two until I went to her and asked why this was an issue. She replied, "Honey the rules state we need to keep even numbers of sports per gender." So, I again left and felt a little defeated then started to count sports. I counted for Fall. Girls' sports are cheer and softball, and boys have football. I counted for Winter. Girls' sports are cheer and basketball, boys have basketball. I counted for Spring. Girls' sports are cheer and track, boys have track. So, all year long it was always two to one girl sports having more every time. I again went back and informed the assistant of this and she said nothing. I went to one of three clinics for tryouts and was given a letter from the School Board stating I did not meet "code of conduct" and "sportsmanship" rules to be allowed to tryout. After all this my father, who did not originally want me to tryout, went to the next Board meeting unannounced. He made sure to bring me and my letter. We walked in, they asked what they could do for us and my father had only this to say and I will never forget, "This is bull shit! The only reason you sent this letter was to discourage him from wanting to be something you are not used to! Bet your ass he will be a model student this year and if you attempt to make any new reasons that he cannot try out we will be seeing you in court!" We then left nothing else said. I worked so hard my freshman year, so hard I landed on the honor roll and had perfect attendance.

Spring came and I was able to try out and I was so nervous. We had three clinic days in which we learned the materials we needed to try out, which consisted of a couple of cheers, dance, jumps, and gymnastics. We met in the school's gymnasium each day and spent a good three hours each day perfecting every word and motion. Finally, the day comes that I have been waiting for. We got out of class that day and met in the gym after we dressed in our try out gear. We stretch and show our judges the cheers and dance as a group so they know what it should look like. After we warm up for the judges we exit into the lobby and one by one we go behind the makeshift door our coaches made from tumbling mat to try out alone. When it was my turn, I got so nervous I did nothing but shake the entire time I was trying out. My jumps and tumbling were fine but once I had to open my mouth it was clear I was nervous. I completed my try out and honestly thought I was horrible. I will admit I did a lot of crying while we waited for the Varsity list to be posted. Then, after what seemed like a thousand years, our head coach Julie posted the list on the glass trophy case by the gym's entrance. We all waited for her to disappear and we all bolted for the list. I allowed the girls to all look before me as I was terrified. But before I could even look my best friend and Senior Morgan looked at me and screamed, "RANDY! We are Captains!" I could not believe what I had heard. I shoved through the crowd and looked, and it was true. I was in shock. Never had anyone been a captain who was not a Senior. I was so happy. We immediately started working on a competition routine in the following weeks. We went to cheer camp over the summer and won a Leadership Award, which is voted on by the other squads. We had a battle with coaches getting fired and old coaches coming back. After camp we got a first-place win at Regionals, which is usually how our squad places. But the real shocker was our State Championship win. We had never gotten first at State without a tie and with

my co-captain we did it. Had I grown up in a bigger school I do not know if I would have been able to experience the drive for standing up for something I wanted to do. In Stewartsville it seemed hard at the time, but had I gone to a larger school in a larger city I would not have been as comfortable with the faculty and staff which is one of the reasons I found it easier to challenge the out dated beliefs.

So, as you see these small towns are amazing and being raised in such a small town like that had its advantages as well as some disadvantages. But I would not change any of it. I was taught that education is a big priority as well as community and tradition. I was also taught that not everybody would agree with or support your dreams but that should not stop you from going after them regardless of who does not like it. My place is and always will be Stewartsville, Missouri. I am proud to say I was raised there regardless of any negative memories. Stewartsville made me stronger and gave me the will to never take no for an answer. I believe in community and believe that places like these will shape most of us into fine adults. I believe we should all get to call a place like this, Home.



Interview

Growing up in a small town

Cristal Alvarez

Growing up in Lenox as a minority can be challenging. It makes you feel hated and unwanted, forced to speak English; it makes you feel stifled: politically and embracing the culture. Regardless of all these things, this small town is still loved. Mia Alvarez is a 15-year-old Sophomore at Lenox High School. She is the oldest sibling out of four kids. She also enjoys playing the piano. Cassandra Padilla is a 19-year-old. She was born in Houston and moved to Lenox when she was little. She is the youngest of four siblings. Mia and Cassandra are one of the few Mexicans in Lenox. Mia is my niece, and Cassandra is one of my high school friends. Being a minority in a small town brought up many issues.

As a minority in Lenox, you often feel hated and unwanted and even get called names. Mia has experienced getting called names. During the interview, Mia states, "When I was 11, this lady told me and my brother that we were stupid Mexicans". Mia and Cassandra both feel it was hard making friends in school because they are minorities. This shows that it was hard being a minority in a small town in Iowa.

In Lenox, Hispanic minorities felt like they weren't able to speak Spanish. They felt like if they did, they could be judged and made fun of. Mrs. Vanik, who was a high school science teacher, wouldn't let people talk in Spanish. Some students were upset about that because they love embracing their culture. Other minorities, including me, didn't care. I wouldn't talk in Spanish because I never wanted someone thinking I was talking about them. When I was younger, I remember not understanding English and

always feeling like I was getting talked about; that's why I never speak Spanish in front of certain people.

In high school, I remember politics were a big deal. Cassandra felt like she had to like and support someone she knew she shouldn't. She would talk about how good President Trump was to try and fit in. She would always call herself a Republican and often made other minorities feel bad. After Cassandra graduated, she realized that she a republican nor a fan of President Trump. Since Mia is 15, she doesn't talk or understand politics, but she knows that she likes the President to fit in.

Embracing the Mexican culture was hard for a lot of minorities. We felt like she couldn't talk about our culture or even celebrate it the way we wanted. Cinco De Mayo was something we didn't talk about. It was never something talked about, not even in our Spanish classes. Every Hispanic in Lenox felt the same way. We felt like we were trapped. We had to act like someone we weren't. Cassandra states, "um honestly felt like I couldn't speak Spanish in front of my other friends at school or express like the love for the culture."

In the interview, I asked Cassandra and Mia what their thoughts of Lenox were, and they said positive things. Mia describes Lenox as "calm" and "safe." Cassandra said, "I would say unique cause I mean like we were kinda all like a family like the community was just tight, and everybody knew each other, and they were all related so it was kinda yeah I would say unique." Regardless of everything that has happened in Lenox, it will always be considered home. We will always have a love for it. Lenox taught us a lot about yourselves and made us realize we are minorities, and we need to embrace it.

In conclusion, it was hard growing up in Lenox. You felt judged and unwanted, forced to speak English, stifled. Even though you thought that way, you will always love

Lenox, Iowa. Lenox will always be a place we will always consider home. Being a minority was challenging for us; we felt like we had become someone we weren't. I never realized how much growing up in a small town affected my mentality. I got used to being one of the few minorities in town. Getting looked at, talked about, and judged became familiar to me. Now that I'm older and in college, I understand that no one should ever feel like they have to change who they are. In high school, I would often felt embarrassed to talk in Spanish. I felt like I could only speak English. This is something the US will always struggle with.

Alcoholism

Sam Cerra

Having a special bond with a family member is invaluable, especially once it has been lost. Nina McCabe is an eighteen-year-old girl from Tolland, Connecticut who has endured a heartbreaking experience. Her father is a struggling alcoholic who refuses to seek help. Growing up, Nina was not all that close with her mother. Her dad was her best friend. They were inseparable and did everything together. Her dad's side of the family was a huge part of everyday life. Nina cherished the relationship she had with her grandfather and family events circled around them. Losing the relationship with her father because of alcohol has shaped Nina into the young woman she is today but has left her feeling empty and missing the father she used to know.

The older Nina became the more she began to recognize her father's irregular behavior. Her emotions began to spiral because of the sudden change in his character. He morphed into a different man, becoming “mean and...very sarcastic and [she] got sick of it.” The deteriorating relationship made Nina depressed and she coped by “[staying] in [her] room a lot more often and didn’t wanna do much.” She was not able to spend quality time with her dad anymore because of how bitter he had become towards her. She dreaded the times he came home drunk. She watched him stumble around the house night after night and become belligerent and argumentative for no reason. She grew tired of his attitude and did not want to be around when he was present. Nina became distant from her friends and family. The family dynamic was no longer the same and it became a heartache for Nina and difficult to handle.

As the relationship between them fell apart, they began to act more like strangers. It was strenuous and stressful to live in the same house with him after countless nights of abuse. Her mother “ended up kicking him out of the house... [and] he only [came] home one week out of every month [so]... [she didn’t] talk to him about things that [were] going on in [her life].” It was a challenging decision her mom knew she needed to make. She saw the effect it was having on Nina’s emotions and did not want her mental health to worsen. Nina was relieved for the first few weeks without her dad in the house but as time went on she missed him terribly. He had moved into her grandfather’s house after he died and rarely came to visit. He missed out on a lot of school events and left Nina feeling forgotten. She was hopeless and knew that she could no longer confide in him for advice without it turning into an argument. Their special bond was broken.

Nina tried to be understanding with her father because she knew the hardship he was facing at the time. She reflected and reconciled that drinking had been a part of her dad’s life for a long time but when his “dad died it [had gotten] a lot worse because he was really close to his dad... and he had already lost his mom... he also found his dad... in his dad’s house the day he died.” It was too much for her father to endure all at once. He was unstable and unsure of how to cope with his emotions, ultimately choosing to self medicate with alcohol. Alcohol was his escape. It made him forget about his troubles and the loss of his dad. This disease was ironically inherited from his father. Nina’s mom begged him to go to rehab but he was reluctant and stubborn, thinking he could quit all on his own. He knew he needed to change and wanted to but his addiction overpowered him, causing his irrational actions.

Nina and her mom have gone through many family issues and emotions but have become stronger because of it. They guided each other and pushed through the

hardship. They learned how to “not take anything personally and to just worry about [themselves].” They created a much closer bond with each other “and started to tell [one another] a lot more about what was going on.” Her mother had opened up to Nina about her father and told her the struggle of fixing the marriage. Counseling had improved the relationship but stopped when Nina’s dad moved to California for his job. They were too far apart to fix anything. Nina and her mother began to spend more time together and stopped keeping secrets. They worked together to get through all the bad days and leaned on each other for strength.

Sobering up is still a work in progress for her father. The decision to quit without any assistance enabled him to make his own rules, which is the opposite of what an alcoholic needs. However, Nina believes that he has “gotten better [but] only because he is really busy out in California and doesn’t... have time to go out with friends or anything...” This being said he is “still the same miserable person... when he comes home. He sometimes drinks, sometimes doesn’t.” Working long hours may decrease his consumption of alcohol but it has not made him happier or apologetic to his family. He has to want the change for himself and his family but Nina understands that it is difficult for him to stop the urge of wanting a drink. Alcoholism is a serious disease that cannot go untreated. Nina's father has suffered the effects of addiction and is struggling to find himself again.

It has been a long road but Nina and her mother have persevered through the heartache. This tragedy was a learning experience. It forced them to look inside themselves and reflect. Having an alcoholic father has taught Nina and her mom to be patient, strong, resilient and forgiving. She has found a renewed joy with her mom and a level of trust and comfort knowing they helped each other. The struggle of an alcoholic

parent is eye opening. Focusing on the positive experiences of her new way of life without her dad has helped Nina to accept what she can not fix. Maturity has replaced naivety and looking towards the future she can hope her dad will find his way back.

A Trip Back Home
Kendra Opoku-Brenyah

The feeling of dragging your suitcase to your gate for the vacation of a lifetime, but this time you are going with your best friend. Think about the memories you will make what else is better than that? Being able to go on vacation with someone who is practically my sister was life changing. The memories we made then I would not change it for anything. Vanessa Frimpong is someone who I practically grew up with from an incredibly young age. Together we went on a trip to our parents' hometown for a Christmas we would never forget. While interviewing my best friend Vanessa about our trip to Ghana, I realized how close we have gotten in our friendship, how a simple concert shaped us, and how little we knew about our family's hometown.

I am not someone who easily trusts others, so being able to trust someone and grow with them for me is so big. That right there describes Vanessa and I, we have grown closer and closer ever since our trip. Vanessa is currently 17 years old, and we have known each other for a while. For us its kind of a blur how we met, when people asked, we just say we grew up together or that we're sisters. "I guess they must've known each other already or maybe had a mutual friend that made their friendship grow quickly." Our parents have known each other since they all lived in Ghana. They were later all reconnected once they moved to Iowa, leading to me and Vanessa basically growing up as sisters. In Ghana, we went to the Central Market, which is like an excessively big farmers market in this big open area past one of the bridges in Ghana and they sold everything there. There were ice cream shops, grandma's selling food and clothing that they had made, Jewelry and many more things. Being that it is ridiculously

hot in Ghana we had on shorts and crop tops etc. To some of the men, we looked older for our age which led multiple men to approach us and try to talk to us. One man grabbed my arm and tried to pull me to where he was because I would not respond to him, I was so scared and uncomfortable I froze and did not know what to do. He was a tall dark skin man, looked about 30, I had never seen this man a day in my life. Vanessa pushed the man off me and grabbed me and we started running away into and around the market until we found our aunts. Growing up with Vanessa, we had our up's and downs but at the end of the day we knew we were family and the bond we had grew each day and no matter what we would help each other get through things.

Being able to experience this afrobeat's concert (Afronation) was a once in a lifetime experience that not everyone has. Afrobeats is a music genre that involves combinations of West African music styles such as Yoruba and highlife. Every year Ghana host an Afrobeats concert and last year, the theme was called "Year of Return" because 2019 marked 400 years since the first arrival of the ships carrying thousands of stolen Africans on the shores of Jamestown. Famous African artist like Burna Boy, Davido, and R2bees all performed. Other celebrities like Idris, Diddy and his sons came to Ghana for the concert as well. Drinks being passed around, everyone smiling and singing along to the music being played, jumping around, and taking pictures, everyone just free. Seeing all these artists in Ghana and how there was no drama, not a whole bunch of paparazzi, everyone was in the moment enjoying themselves singing along and being themselves. Vanessa and I are the same people, we enjoy the same things "Being in my home country, surrounded by others who knew all the music and were all there to have fun made that experience more exhilarating. Having Kendra on my side, matching my energy and excitement made it an experience I will never forget." For me I always

feel as if people get annoyed by my presence that I sometimes distant myself so to hear that Vanessa enjoyed this with me really lifted my spirit. The fact that the Afrobeats theme was called “Year of Returns” and we were back in the place where it all started just impacted the way we went on with our lives.

Being able to experience where your parents grew up is such an amazing experience to do with your best friend. We went to Bojo Beach, Makola Market, the mall, and some museums. Before ever going to Ghana I did not think it was a place that is so well developed. The trip we took to Ghana wasn’t just for fun, there was an educational purpose to it as well “I think it better made me understand that Ghana is pretty developed and is a tourist spot for sure.”

When you think of Africa you think of dirt, land and huts because that is what the media portrays. Ghana and the rest of Africa is not like that. Ghana is very well developed, everything there is in America I guarantee you can find it in Ghana. Aside from that we were able to visit the houses our parents grew up in, their schools and hangout spots. Going on a vacation with someone you share your deepest secrets with shows you a different side of your relationship. “Being able to go on a whole trip to another country with someone and spending the whole time with them, it truly brings you closer. You are up late at night talking about anything and everything. You are going out doing things together, making memories and meeting new people together.” For us, being able to experience the town where our parents grew up made me realize how close we want to be to our roots. Not everyone is lucky to go back and visit where their parents grow up. Some places are safe and for us to be able to go back to where our parent’s lives started made us grateful for what we have.

While talking Vanessa about our Trip to Ghana I realized how close we have gotten in our friendship, how a simple concert shaped us and how little we knew about our family's hometown. This trip changed who I am and how my view was, being able to share it with someone who is like a sister to me was an experience I would not ever trade. The connections and memories we made changed the way we view our lives now. In the future I hope to continuously travel back home and one day take my kids to see the many things Ghana has to offer. As Kate Douglas Wiggin once said, "There is a kind of magicless about going far away and then coming back all changed."

The fire
Mary Fultz

Imagine leaving your house for school one morning not knowing that was the last time you would ever step foot in your house again, Imagine standing in your backyard watching firefighters tear into your roof to try and stop the flames that have taken over and engulfed the entire structure. 13 years of memories up in flames before your eyes. The feeling is unexplainable and is something I wouldn't wish upon anyone. My family experienced a house fire the second day of school of my senior year in high school, august 2019. It was a fire that resulted in the total loss of our house and everything in it. Luckily my family wasn't inside when it happened and everyone was safe and ok. While losing everything to a house fire, it's important to always find the good in a situation. I lost all of my material items, but in the end I still had my family which was all that mattered because lives can't be rebought. When I felt as though my world was crashing down, being close with my family and their support, I learned, was all I needed to get through any hard time.

August 28th was a day that will haunt me for the rest of my life, it was a beautiful Wednesday morning, sunny with not a cloud in the sky. My brother, sister and I woke up happy and ready to start this day of school, everything was going good. I was having a great day and it was flying by and I was so excited to go home. Little did I know that wouldn't be an option for me ever again and within the next hour of school my life would forever change. I get to my fifth hour class which is economics and my last class of the day so I'm anticipating the whole hour for that bell to ring so I am able to go home. As I'm sitting at desks listening to Mr. Weiss talks about economic goals and

scarcity a pass comes in the room for me, I don't think anything of it so I head down to the front office where it tells me to go. I got into the office and the receptionist told me to call my mom, I didn't have any concern. I thought it was just a normal request from my mom to bring my siblings home from school or something small like that. I call my mom and I hear something I would never have thought in my entire life I would hear come from her mouth, she says “you need to get home to your grandpa, the house is on fire”. My world stops, tears instantly rush down my face. I couldn't believe it, you don't hear about houses burning down. It's not common and it's something you never think will happen to you. I rush to my economics class in terror. I grab my bag and say I have to leave, leaving the whole class and my teacher confused for what has happened. I run to my car in a panic I get in and instantly drive as quickly as I can to get home, I didn't even know what i was going to pull up to when I got there I didn't know what to expect so the whole car ride my mind was racing at what I could be driving up on. As I turned onto my street my world turned upside down. I was a mess at this point I couldn't even see I was crying so hard. Three towns of firetrucks filled my street and driveway. I park my car as close as I could down the street and I run through the trees, passing neighbors watching and more firefighters than I have ever seen. I get to my dad and grandpa and don't even know what to feel as I watch my house completely burned down. All the memories, my entire childhood and all of my things go up in smoke, it was a feeling I can never explain and a feeling I would never wish upon anyone.

Although it was such a scary time and as i felt as though i had nothing the ongoing support from my friends and family and our entire community made me feel like i was loved and supported and that i wouldn't go through this alone. When I first got to my house I instantly texted all of my friends to tell them what had happened

because they play such a major role in my life that I really wanted them there with me. They all dropped everything and came to be with me, they started posting on social media and within an hour of the fire they began raising money for my family and I. The support we had from our friends and family was what helped us get through the first few months of the loss. That is why i think having strong good relationships with people is so important, having people who have your back no matter what and just want to see you succeed in life make a world of difference and i wouldn't have gotten through it without them.

One of the biggest lessons I have learned since this has happened was to never take anything for granted. When I look back on everything I think about all the amazing times I had in that house and memories I made and how I would want to go back and just experience that feeling one more time. Even though the place I made forever memories in is no longer there, the people I made them with still are and that's all that matters to me. This meant the most to me out of all the lessons I learned from this because it showed me truly how precious life is and I think you should always just realize what you have appreciate what you have before it is gone, your life can change in the matter of seconds you should always just look around and appreciate what you have and where you are in life because you never know what could happen and it could all just be stripped away in front of your eyes.

When you feel like your world is crashing down all around you and you feel as though there is nothing going right I learned to always find the good in a situation no matter how small or how hard it is. Thinking back to that day and months after that I realize how sad I was. I had just experienced the biggest heartbreak I have ever experienced right at the beginning of my senior year of high school when I was supposed

to be having the most fun and enjoying my last year with my best friends. As months went by i realized how grateful i should be, my whole family was safe and ok, that was the bright side. No one was hurt, no one was inside and i am forever grateful for that, things can be rebuilt and re bought but lives cannot and i have come to realize no matter how difficult it was losing all of my things nothing would be able to replace the loss i would have felt if someone was inside that house. Looking at the brightside in a situation can change the whole perspective, yeah something can be really bad and it may be hard but if there is a small chance that any type of good came out of it then that is what you should focus your energy on. Focusing your energy on the good instead of all the bad is a game changer and if i were to give anyone advice while they are going through a tough situation it would be to try and find one thing good that came out of it.

Even though losing all of my material items in a house fire was traumatizing and devastating I have learned so many tips that have changed my life like never taking anything for granted and always looking on the bright side of things makes a huge difference. I think that it's important for me to share my experience even though most people won't go through a house fire like I did . Everyone will experience things in their life where they could use the things I used to help them in their situation.

The Joplin Tornado: My Mother's Side of Things

Natasha Maynard

Nothing is worse than having to experience a traumatic event like a tornado. My mother and I survived one of the worst tornados in tornado history. Logically, we should not be here, and even my mother would say that. My mom, Mary, has an intriguing background, in which some of the experiences helped us survive in this tiny closet. My mom grew up with ten other children in her family to start things off, and she lived on a farm. She spent most of her time growing up in Australia, which had many sandstorms that she could use the experience from the sandstorms to help survive a tornado. This tornado was the Joplin Tornado that struck on 22 May 2011; our memories of the tornado differ even though we shared that claustrophobic closet space, and this day affected my mom more than me in the long run.

So, while my mom and I shared the same event, we have different memories of things that happened. For example, my mother remembers hearing the freight train's horn outside of the closet and me freaking out about the conductor not knowing what to do during a tornado. As my mother states, "Before I got into the closet, we heard the sound of a train comin' and you were like "Oh mom the conductor is not gonna know what to do when a tornado," and I said don't worry they've done their training, but in the back of my mind I knew there was a tornado that hit the ground and that was the rumbling sound, but I didn't tell you that cause I didn't want to freak you out any more than you already were so I grabbed the blanket and said okay let's get in." She is saying that I was in the closet waiting for her. She was just outside the closet when we heard a train and me freaking out about the conductor, not knowing what to do during a

tornado. Hence, she grabbed a blanket and came in with me, telling me it would be okay because she knew it was the rumbling of the tornado, and she did not want to freak me out more. However, I don't remember it being like this; I remember us both being in the closet when I hear the horn of a freight train and asked her if she could hear the train, and thirty seconds later, the tornado hit. I find it interesting that we shared this memory, but we do not remember it the same.

On a different note, my mother had some long-term effects from the tornado, where I did not. My mother faces PTSD and may face it for the rest of her life due to the disastrous tornado. As my mom puts, "Then, I think shock started setting into me because I was out of it, I mean I was functioning, but I wasn't functioning. I was going through motions, but my mind kept drifting. I had to talk to people, but I would just like, you know, waver off." My mother's point is that she was affected by the tornado in a way that she could barely do anything as she could before. Unfortunately, I don't remember much after the tornado, but I do know that my mom was affected in a way that I was not, I mean, I stood up for my mom in those hard times, and I don't remember any of it. While my mother and I have different marks left on us by the tornado, we will always care for each other.

Now my mother has been an anxious one for as long as I can remember; she worries a lot about her family. However, the tornado amplified her anxiety, not only of storms but everything else as well. As she states, "My thought pattern stuff is different now, I worry a lot more than I used to, panic wise." My mom is saying that after the tornado, she noticed that she started to worry more than she did before the tornado. My mother and I have this in common; I became more anxious after the tornado than

before. Her anxiety showed when I was planning to go to college here at Missouri Western State University.

My mother faces Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as I have mentioned before in this paper, but I want to let you know that you can help people cope with PTSD. If a family member or someone close to you faces PTSD, there are ways to help them cope. One of the many things that can help people with PTSD is counseling, but they must genuinely seek help independently; you cannot help someone who does not want to be helped. My mother even says, "End up having to go to counseling a little bit there, that helped out a lot. I wasn't a believer in counseling, but I am now cause it does help, and it does work." She says that counseling helped her a lot and that she used to think that counseling was just pseudoscience, but now she understands that counseling truly does help someone recover from mental trauma. At Mayo Clinic, they have some ways to help someone you love cope with, and I found that the most effective coping methods to help are learning about PTSD and being there and willing to listen. I may not have suffered from PTSD as my mother has, but that is also why I want to bring some light to how I can help her cope and how you can help others.

While my mother's memories differ from mine, she was affected more than I was due to the Joplin Tornado. This essay is essential because I finally get to listen and tell my mom's side of the story. We are two halves of a whole, and we rely on each other ever since the tornado. I hope you learned how important this topic was for my mother and me. The Joplin Tornado changed our lives, and we are both grateful that we are still here to tell this story to others.

Hair Standards in America

Intisar Nourain

Society plays a huge part in breaking down African American girl's and women's confidence based on their hair. We call this a standard because if it wasn't, we wouldn't be judged for what we look like. Twenty-one-year-old Susie Dakorson Reflects on her journey of breaking the ideal beauty standard in America. She shares childhood memories of what it was like going to school with African American Hair. Hair standards in America affected Susie because growing up she felt like she could never be herself. Susie went to school in fear of being bullied every day like other African American girls just for their hair because it wasn't long enough nor was it straight.

Susie was born in Sara Leon a country in West Africa. Susie came to America when she was just five years old. In Africa, natural hair texture is praised no matter the curl pattern, length, or texture of the hair. Women show off what they are born with and aren't judged. Little girls can wake up in the morning and leave their house without taming their hair and just letting it be. During the interview, I asked Susie "How did woman and girls style their hair in Africa?" so viewers could understand what she was used to being around. and she proclaimed. "The women and girls styled their hair in protective styles such as box braids and twist to protect their natural hair because it's very fragile and the less manipulation to our hair the easier it is for it to grow faster and be healthier" (1:10). African- American women have 4c type of hair texture, and by 4c I mean tightly coiled strands that are fragile and undergo lots of shrinkages. In Africa, women are surrounded by treatments and remedies to help grow their luscious hair.

Furthermore, for Susie, coming to America at the age of five and entering the American school system was a drastic change for her. She began to observe her peers stating. “Their hair was very different from mine, it was very fine, very straight, so it was more of a shock at a younger age knowing oh I don’t look like these people, or I don’t fit in” (03:05). Some of us may know the feeling of moving to a new school, and it’s kind of the same thing except your moving to a different country which is more frightening. Susie reflects on her childhood. “Back in elementary school, I was the only black girl in my class” (02:53). Additionally, being the only person of color in her classroom was something that stood out and pulled her to feel like she didn’t fit in already.

We quickly dove in to dissect the meaning behind the ideal hair standard in America, which Susie describes being mostly fine, straight, and very long hair, kind of like the European standards of beauty” (03:27). These were the terms used to describe the ideal hair standard because this is what was considered normal in school. Girls with that kind of hair wouldn’t be teased but praised. After recognizing the norm Susie felt like she always had to have long hair that was similar to their texture so she could fit in better. Susie wanted to look like the other girls in her class, so she began to alter her natural state of hair with a relaxer. For the people who don’t know what a relaxer is, it’s a “Dangerous chemical that breaks our natural curl pattern forcing our hair to become straight” (05:29). Not only did Susie begin perming her hair but she also wore weaves and straight-haired extensions. She got used to the cycle of portraying herself as someone she was not while in school from the pressure of trying to fit in.

Many factors drove Susie away from wearing her natural hair to school. One is that it was considered “unpresentable” and “unattractive” (07:32). When Susie was in middle school, she remembers thinking to herself. “I want a boyfriend, and all of these

girls are getting attention, and that's when you're hitting puberty. So, I wanted to look my best and I noticed that a lot of the popular girls had straight hair and I know that people would make fun of me if I wore my natural curls. They would call me nappy or say, 'you need to go perm your hair.' It was uncommon for you to wear your natural textured hair; it just wasn't acceptable in that time of my life" (07:40). Susie felt as though she had to uphold these hair standards because those popular girls who already had that kind of hair, were treated differently, and she wanted to feel that way. Another reason why she feared showing her natural hair at school was due to the bullying that occurred to fellow African American girls. Susie watched other girls get bullied on a daily saying "she's bald" (09:08). The kids in school were very mean and made her feel uncomfortable to wear her hair natural. "she doesn't have no hair; it can't grow past her shoulders" (09:04). People's opinions were you weren't well taken care of or well-groomed if you wore your hair natural as a child. Susie confesses she tried her best to prevent interactions of being called out by wearing her hair straight.

In 2011 Susie finally shattered the image of the girl who loved damaging her natural hair. After discovering an African American YouTube or showing off her natural hair she became inspired. "I remember her hair looked just like mine and it was so long it was like waist length and I literally adored her I was like "Oh my gosh, how is this true? Black people's hair can grow? (10:58). After being fascinated with an African American YouTuber, Susie began following her tips to grow your natural hair and the first step was to cut off relaxers. So, in eighth grade she finally stopped using a relaxer, although she was still very insecure with her hair. She took measures to get her hair back on a healthy path. "I wanted to grow my hair naturally again and I wanted to put on a wig and have my natural hair braided. By not manipulating it but just like grow it

out and try to be more careful with the way I brush my hair because it can cause damage. So, I kind of broke that barrier when I saw other black women that had similar hair texture to mine, and I learned from them and I started my hair journey from their” (12:31). Social media influenced Susie and gave her the confidence she needed to embrace her natural curl pattern and texture. She came across hashtags that said, “Nappy hair doesn’t exist because this is your natural hair” (14:17). This experience shaped her into becoming a very confident, embracing, and motivated woman to the people who also share the same struggle.

To the young African American girls who are still struggling every day with the Hair standards in America, Susie had some advice to encourage them to take back their confidence. “Loving yourself comes with time, it doesn’t happen overnight” (20:54). At the end of her journey, she learned that it was easier to be herself than it was to fake a persona. I asked Susie “Do you think that other young African-American girls are going through the struggle of having to fit into this ideal hair standard in today’s day and age or do you believe it has changed?” She expressed that it has drastically changed, and it’s become better but there are still some changes that need to be worked on. African American hair is now being talked about more on television, it’s being embraced for its shortness, and it’s being seen on billboards. “It’s all about self acceptance and learning how to love yourself. If you go on social media, surround yourself with girls that look like you. Start surrounding yourself in your culture. Start looking at all the black women who wear protective styles and start finding yourself through that” (20:08). African American girls shouldn’t be ashamed of their hair but instead, accept and celebrate themselves for being unique.

Without a doubt, the role society played in the ideal hair standard affected Susie emotionally. The aspect that triggered this was society upholding long, straight hair as the beauty standard. “My mom gave me a hard time saying, ‘Oh, you need to perm your hair, your hair is nappy!’ I didn’t really feel beautiful after hearing that and I was just hoping and praying like, when will my hair grow down to my feet? or when can I be like Cinderella? Because I’m looking at all these cartoons that have the European standards of beauty and all these tv shows and I’ve seen less people that look like me when I was younger, so they kind of made me feel like I wasn’t beautiful enough” (22:41). Society as a whole should do better when it comes to accepting one another for who we are. Parents should be able to teach their kids to accept everyone how they are. This isn’t just Susie’s issue with not feeling confident in herself, people shouldn’t judge others to make them feel like they don’t fit in. Parents were also part of the reason why girls don’t have the confidence to wear their hair natural because they were considered pretty after relaxing their hair. So, at school, African American girls were judged for natural hair, at home their prettier with relaxed hair and in stores. Cinderella is considered beautiful and so were all the Disney princesses but none of them looked like her. So, where did you fit in exactly? I asked, “How did it affect your confidence noticing this?” (24:50) and in a saddened tone she answered, “It affected my confidence a lot. It made me very insecure. It made me want to try more and be perfect. What did I need to do to be perfect? Like socially accepted or considered very beautiful because it’s in a girl’s nature to want to feel beauty” (25:00)

I related to many of the experiences Susie shared that unlocked memories from my childhood that I forgot I had. This problem can simply be solved by society accepting the fact that we were all created differently and although we are all different, we all

deserve to be treated equally. No one is better than the other because they have an attribute that one group *decides* is "better" than the other. The Hair standards that Susie had to overcome in her teenage years while in the American school system affected her confidence, and her mental health. Susie isn't alone in this battle there are many young African American girls/Adults that have stories on their experience. This is a topic that isn't talked about often but needs some light to be shed on. Let girls and Woman know they are beautiful for having different hair.

Sexism in Video Games

Kailey Roades

Video games are a common pastime in today's society. People log into video games to talk or communicate with their teammates for a stronger chance of winning the game. Not everyone uses the voice communication feature to be helpful, though. Voice channels are commonplace for female gamers to encounter sexist comments and insults. Every girl I know who plays games has experienced this at least once in any competitive game they've played. In view of this fact, I interviewed one of my dear friends, Lena. I know she has gone through this sort of thing countless times, especially considering we were often together when these incidents happened.

Sexism exists in competitive video games. For as long as I have played, I have noticed how female gamers form groups with one another. This community within video games was created by females who were tired of having to stand up for themselves or others every game. Lena often mentions how she feels compelled to "jump in and have their backs" when other female gamers were subject to verbal harassment. Apart from wanting to stand up for other gamers, Lena seems to, "feel a sense of pride when another female gamer shows that they're better or superior than what others expected them to be." This is an example of the comradery that female gamers have. After all, they have gone through similar experiences in their games. It's normal for players to befriend or hang out with those who are similar to them. This clan of mostly female gamers provides a sense of belonging since they can find pride in one another. It also provides relief because it creates a place in the gaming community for them to be

themselves without criticism. In fact, this is a place where they are not considered the minority.

Discrimination goes against the morales of numerous players. Yet, it's brought up consistently in competitive games when players get angry. There's various reasons as to why they do this but the most common reason is to shift blame and defend their pride. However, this is just an excuse to display poor behavior and bad sportsmanship. This occurrence is routine, according to Lena, because, "people sometimes can't handle the fact that there are others. . . better than them." These instances are generally not taken well and it leads to the use of aspects outside of the game for insults. Players do this so they can hurt the person as payback for hurting their pride. In this case, it's the use of gender as an insult in video games. Players should never use gender to insult others who aren't doing well in the game. In fact, Lena explains that "their gender. . . has nothing to do with the video game, [and] their skill level." When the act of pointing out a player's gender is used as a way of defending someone's pride, then they've lost the right to be taken seriously. Instead, accepting blame without insulting others is a way of showing good sportsmanship in the game.

Gender based discrimination in video games is a double edged blade. This can have different effects on people. It could cause players to be more cautious about how they perform and communicate or it could bring out a more headstrong side of someone. Lena, who takes a more stalwart approach, exclaims that she will always "stand up when [her] friends or others get yelled at for nothing, for things they can't change." Lena has a very forthright personality which is probably why she is so quick to defend herself and others. With the exception of Lena and those like her, I have witnessed people back down when discriminated against in games. Overall, backing

down seems to be the usual response of most. It is not an easy feat to stand up against a rude person if the victim is not outspoken. From what I see, the common action that the victims take is to either leave or stop communicating for the duration of the game.

Leaving or no longer communicating is a side effect of people letting emotions get the best of them in that scenario. These emotions usually range from anger to frustration. I always feel bad seeing these instances take place because it means the victim has gotten overwhelmed or hurt.

There are ways to get these types of players punished for their remarks in the game, but it rarely bears fruit. Oftentimes this is because the game's staff deem their behavior as not severe enough to receive punishment. These situations are frustrating for anyone in the gaming community, including me. Even Lena is frustrated by how the staff works. She told me that about "one fifth of the people [she] report[s] get repercussions for their actions and that's just not enough." If these people aren't reprimanded for these actions then they'll never know when to stop. Lena told me that if she was a part of the staff in a game she would dish out harsher punishments like "an account ban, and if they proceed to make new accounts and continue the same behavior, they can get an IP ban to prevent them from ever playing the game again." All so people would stop this disgusting behavior. I have seen people reprimanded for using religious slurs and leaving the game. Yet, male gamers are allowed to ask the females in their games for nudes and to go back to the kitchen to make them a sandwich. This isn't even the worst of the stuff I've heard in my games.. It's mind boggling how these comments are allowed on the daily. This behavior should be given more attention than it is given now.

If video games are growing more advanced with each day, then the people who play them need to learn to accept a modernized perspective. The communities in video games need to step away from the idea that it is a sport or type of entertainment reserved for males. Furthermore, it needs to stop being the breeding ground for future misogynists and tainting the enjoyment that video games were made to provide. So much of today's society has grown apart from the concept of being specific to one gender, so it is about time video games do the same.

The Impact of a Parent's Divorce on the Child

Teaghen Schraufek-Forshee

When parents' divorce, it can open a door to more hardships in the already challenging formative years of a child's life. Divorce can turn a child's life upside down in many different ways. Especially, when they are separated from one parent adds to the devastation of divorce. It's been about 6 years since my parents' divorce, to this day I'm still learning to deal with the damage that came along with it. After my parents' divorce, my father went back to traveling for work. He would work every day, almost all year long. I would only see him once a year for a few hours and he'd drive back to wherever he was working at the time. This was extremely hard on me. Due to the absence of my father in my life, I developed severe anxiety and depression. I chose to interview my mother about her divorce with my father, this event we experienced together. I wanted to see how we were affected differently by this shared event. In my experience, divorce can be more difficult for the children than it is for the parents.

It was just a typical night at home, I don't really remember what happened moments before for the following events to occur, but this is what I remember and witnessed the night my parent's marriage ended. I heard yelling coming from my mom upstairs. My dad had his hands wrapped around my mom's wrists as she's trying to break from his grip. I was confused about what was happening and had no idea what to do. Once my dad let go of her, all I remember is her walking out the front door saying something, but the only words out of her mouth that I remember and stuck with me were, "You guys are better off without me, I'm better off dead". After I heard those

words and saw that door shut, I've never been so scared in my life. I didn't know where she was going, what she was going to do, or if I was ever going to see my mom or anyone from her family again. I felt helpless and useless, I didn't know what to do. My dad didn't really make much of an effort to help comfort my sister and I when my mom just walked out of the house and left, he just talked down about my mom, making her sound bad. About 30 minutes had passed, the next thing I remember is the police showed up and my uncle showed up with my mom. My dad is talking to the police and wants my sister and I to talk to them and is trying to turn us against our mom. My uncle talks to me reminding us how much our mom has done for us and how much my dad has been around. I didn't want to talk to the officers, I was just scared and didn't want anything to happen to my mom and didn't want my dad to take us from her. Everything's a blur after that, all I remember is my dad taking his stuff and leaving that night. After that, the next few months, I would see him every other weekend for a few hours until my parent's divorce was official and he got a job down south. After those factors occurred, I went from living with my dad and seeing him every day to seeing him a few hours every other weekend to seeing him a few hours once a year. Rarely seeing or hearing from my dad had a huge impact on me, but I wouldn't show it.

The parents are affected differently by their divorce than the child. During my interview, I asked my mother how she felt after the divorce, and her response was, "I was very scared because I was a stay-at-home mom for 18 years, I never left my girls, I had always been with them, so I haven't worked. Trying to start over at 50 years old was hard." After the divorce, my mother had to make a lot of changes like the major one was she had to get a job. My mother was affected very differently by the divorce than I was.

She wasn't emotional damaged and broken like I was. It was scary at first because she had to make some changes to be able to survive and help support us. She had to do things she didn't have to do while she was married to my father. She had to start all over and learn to do it by herself. This didn't hurt her, in our interview, she said all of this made her stronger and I agree. She's a lot happier out of the marriage and in her life today. She's grown from her divorce. This piece of the interview is a perfect example to show that parents and children are affected differently in the parents' divorce. From my mother's experience, this divorce was a good thing. It helped her to learn to support herself and her children on her own. She grew from it and learned; it made her a stronger woman.

If parents are wanting to get a divorce, they should make a plan that works for both to be actively in their child's life. During my interview, I asked my mother how my dad has been after the divorce and her response was, "Your dad isn't around at all. You've seen him once or twice in maybe 3 years, or so." But she also explained, "I will say one thing, I am thankful for that because if he didn't help you guys wouldn't have near things done you've had today." Growing up my father was actively in my life, he worked, but he was around. He would play with us when we were little, and we went on a bunch of little family trips. After the divorce, that all changed. I went from having my father around in my life to barely at all. My father may not be around, but he always makes sure we are taken care of. If I need any medical or dental work, he makes sure it's taken care of and I get it. I wouldn't have a lot of things if it wasn't for my dad. My mother and I are very thankful for all he does for my sister and I. These quotes from the interview show that father is supportive but isn't actively in my life. My father barely

being around has been extremely hard on me causing me a lot of problems I carry with me on a day-to-day basis.

Children of divorced parents often develop and struggle with a mental illness. During my interview, I asked my mother what the worst part of the divorce was and she said, “I still worry about you and your sister because that still affects you, I think”. People say children will get over their parents’ divorce, but they don’t understand how much deeper this pain is for the children. Due to the divorce and what came along with it, I’ve developed severe anxiety and depression. It’s been 6 years since my parents got divorced and I am still struggling with it. Even my own mother sees it and how much it broke me. My mother worries about me and my mental health every day. She sees how much I’ve changed since their divorce. I am at war with myself every day. Every day, I feel this emptiness because my father isn’t around as much anymore. I am constantly questioning and doubting myself. I have a hard time trusting people and letting them in my life because I fear of being hurt and abandoned. People do not understand how much baggage and damage a divorced child carry and live with every day, probably even the rest of their lives. My personal experience with my parents’ divorce is a perfect example of how myself and other children are affected by this.

In my experience, divorce can be more difficult for the children than it is for the parents. I don’t think children of divorced parents are acknowledged enough. I am speaking for them from my experience. People say we will get over it, but there’s so much heartbreak that comes with it, especially when you’re like me and you don’t see one of your parents as much. It’s extremely hard and causing a lot more damage than you think. I’ve developed anxiety and depression from my father not being an active

parent in my life. It is a day-to-day battle. If you are the parent and are thinking about getting a divorce, think about your child and how it may affect them. Make a plan with the other parent to make sure you both are going to be around and actively in the child's life. I definitely think the divorce would of affected me differently if I got to see my father more than once a year. "There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleed."

Loving a soldier

Alloura Stevens

Being a military girlfriend is difficult, It is not loving my soldier that is hard. The distance is hard; the worry is hard; the sacrifices are hard. My boyfriend, Pvt. Jesse Miller joined the Army National Guard in April 2019. He left for basic training on June 10th in Fort Jackson, South Carolina. Basic would last ten and a half weeks, which during that time we did not have much contact, letters, and a few phone calls. What was a weird concept to me was that he had to do workouts to receive his mail. Depending on the drill sergeant and their mood, Jess would have to do a workout for each piece of mail, mostly 10 pushups, v ups, or sit-ups for each piece of mail. That late August, I attended his graduation with his family. That week would be the first time I physically saw him since he left. It felt unreal that I was going to get to see him. I was told I could spend part of the week with him before dropping him off at AIT in Fort Gordon, Georgia. I wanted to do this interview to show others a glimpse of the challenges and rewards a military relationship goes through by sharing our story.

I always had this idea in my head that Jesse had a lot to do for family day and graduation. When thinking about it I pictured him working super hard both days to get everything ready, but that they would have significant breaks and food because they were almost done with training. Jesse enlightened me with what really took place. He explained, "I was just preparing for family day, it was very exhausting. Just nonstop work, no sleep, little food. It was great." I learned that the morning of the family day was just like any other day, cleaning and working out. Graduation was a little different because they were given two duffle bags and one hour to pack all their stuff in them.

When I learned that's what took place I was surprised. I also can still vividly remember them marching out after smoke bombs were thrown. The crowd went wild as the song soldiers played in the background. It was the first time we laid eyes on our soldiers. The first moment I saw my soldier, I was just so nervous and excited. To be honest, I didn't really care about what was happening or around me because all I wanted to do is to be with him. Because of the rush of excitement, I never thought to ask at that moment what all did he have to do to get ready. I figured he had a bunch of special tasks to do and that he was just ready to be with us. So, during this interview was the first time we ever talked about him getting ready for family day and graduation.

The moment we could go get our soldiers was thrilling and kind of nerve-wracking. Jesse looked like he was surprised but super happy when he finally saw me. I truly had surprised him because he thought I could not come due to school. Supriningg him and seeing the look of excitement on his face made my day. In Jesse's view, "I was so excited because it was like it was the light at the end of that tunnel. Honestly, I just went through hell week and everything, getting through the military only getting to call and writing letters, not actually seeing people I care about and talk to them, it was just really nice." Jesse's point is that he was super excited to see us after several weeks of basic training. He claims it felt unreal that we all got to be there with him. We were told that we would have to have him at AIT in Georgia by Friday at a specific time. So that meant we would get to spend the rest of Wednesday and Thursday and part of Friday together. During that time we had many laughs and shared quality time with his family.

That Friday I wasn't prepared or ready to say goodbye. When we went to go drop him off they allowed us to come inside. During that time, I watched him get into trouble with a drill sergeant over some paperwork. Looking back at that moment we both can

laugh about the situation, but at the time it was hard to see. What we didn't know was that they would allow him to spend another day with us. That extra day with him made all the difference, but we still weren't ready to say goodbye. According to Jesse, "The hardest part was definitely leaving. Having gone away to AIT, knowing I was going to be gone almost another year" After we said goodbye I cried for a long time in the car because I knew the next time I would get to see him, might be Christmas time. I also had no clue if AIT would be like basic training with hardly any calls. Thankfully it wasn't, but it still was difficult. It was obvious we were both not major fans of being away from each other that long. I never knew just how hard saying goodbye for the second time was for him. So, for him to openly say that this moment was super hard and a struggle he dealt with, it hit deep.

Being in a committed relationship with someone in the military has its challenges, but I wouldn't change it for the world. Jesse and I learned how to get over those challenges together and through that, we strengthened our bond more than ever. We learned that even though the distance is sometimes hard, communication helps us stay on track whether it's by letter, phone, or seeing each other in person. We like to believe that, "distance teaches us to appreciate the days that we are able to spend together and distance teaches us the definition of patience. It is a reminder that every moment together is special, and every second together should be cherished."

Identity



Heroes and Villains

Megan Dahlhauser

Life is rarely easy. There are obstacles to overcome, foes we face, and disasters that strike us at our most vulnerable times. We can't change the way of the world, though we can try to make it a better place, all we can change is ourselves. Mel Robbins, a life coach, gave a TedTalk speech inspired by that concept called 'How to Stop Screwing Yourself'. As she points out in her presentation, oftentimes we get in our own way of what we want and had made it her life's work to inspire change in others so that they can achieve their goals, too. I felt this resonated not just with myself but also with Tara Westover, author of *Educated*. Tara's story is unique in her personal experiences, but relays common topics that many others struggle with such as; abuse, religion, mental illness, family conflict, inner turmoil, but most of all personal growth. Tara Westover wrote her story to give herself a voice and as many have been quoted saying before, 'We are the heroes of our own story'. I think, however, it is important to acknowledge the times that we are also the villains so that we can put an end to self destructive behavior.

Tara Westover lived a life that many would view as strange and otherworldly. *Educated* is Tara Westover's journey through childhood to adulthood. She grew up secluded from the modern world, living beneath the mountain she both lovingly and bitterly refers to as the Indian Princess. It is both her home and her prison. Her family was strictly Mormon, ruled by her father who later she believes suffers from mental illnesses, but due to his paranoid conspiracy theories never received a diagnosis nor help for. As a result of her father's adherence to his delusions she could only watch as her

brother was exiled from the family for his desire to go to college. She writes later, “My family was splitting down the middle--the three who had left the mountain, and the four who had stayed. The three with doctorates, and the four without high school diplomas. A chasm had appeared and was growing” (Westover 326) to which her brother’s exile was the catalyst for and inspired Tara herself to follow in his footsteps, despite the fallout it would cause between her family and herself. Tara deciding to pursue an education was the first step towards changing her life, but changing herself, did not come as easily.

To many college students, some of whom are only pursuing a degree because their parents are forcing them to, her experience must be polarizing. Mel Robbins asks, what do you want? She says "Getting what you want is simple. Notice I said it's simple. Simple, but not easy." She goes on to lecture that we could look up a how-to guide online at any time to get a step by step process of how to achieve any of your goals. Whatever it is that we want, we could have, we could see how others who wanted the same thing got it. It’s simple, but not easy. It would be simple for Tara Westover to go to college, to walk away from her family, but it wouldn’t be easy to not be able to see the ones she loved. It is simple to get a job and work to pay for college, but it isn’t easy to have a job while in school. That is something I can vouch for. There is a point in Tara’s story, in chapter 23 where Tara seeks counsel from a bishop of her church on the upcoming bills and medical expenses The bishop offers her help, tries to talk to her into accepting grants, in taking money from the church, and leads to the bishop saying “You need to learn to accept help” (Westover 204). The delusional words of her father echoed in her mind, despite him not being there, the lessons he forced into her head were harder for her to leave behind than the mountain in a rearview mirror.

Mel Robbins points out that the greatest change happens when we make ourselves uncomfortable, when we push ourselves out of our comfort zone and into new experiences. We see Tara Westover do this time and time again, from when she first went to college, to when she finally caved and accepted grant money for college, when she got sick and had to force herself to take medicine to feel better. Despite knowing that her parents beliefs were not based in fact, she still struggled to let go of their way of thinking. “I write this until I believe it, which doesn’t take long because I want to believe it. It’s comforting to think the defect is mine, because that means it is under my power.” (Westover 195) It is hard to let go of something that is in our head, something that has become a part of our identity. “It’s strange how you give the people you love so much power over you, I had written in my journal. But Shawn had more power over me than I could possibly have imagined. He had defined me to myself, and there’s no greater power than that.” (Westover 199). One of the most epic turning points of the story I think is not just when Tara evolves past her comfort zone, but she pushes her mother to do the same. As they correspond and talk about brother Shawn’s abuse to his wife Emily. Tara tries to justify her mother’s absence, but her mother openly admits her own fault when she says, “But sometimes, I think we choose our illness, because they benefit us in some way. It’s easier.” It is a powerful remark I agree with. In this moment her mother is acknowledging her own shortcomings.

As the TedTalk host points out, we lie to ourselves. We say ‘we are fine’ to ourselves, when we aren’t. Mel Robbins describes how we lose the motivation to push ourselves by settling, which I think Tara Westover did a great job of overcoming. She didn’t settle for life on the mountain under her father and brother’s reign of terror, she didn’t settle okay grades and even pushed herself to top tier schools, she worked hard to

achieve life changing results and is now a best selling author. Tara Westover faced more obstacles than many people from childhood abuse, college stress, work environments, and she did a great job of looking at her life and deciding, is this good enough? When it came to her family, she knew that as much as she loved them, she wouldn't be able to continue with them in her life if they weren't willing to change, too. Tara says in an interview, "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 look at all the ways that Tara Westover changed to overcome her circumstances and the motivational words of Mel Robbins screaming "You are screwing yourself," and I know I am guilty of doing just that. As I said at the beginning, there are obstacles, there are foes, and there are disasters. Life is hard but that isn't an excuse. It has taken me a long time to get where I am. One of my biggest obstacles I have had to overcome has been my family, just like Tara.. We didn't have a mountain to call home but in a way we were isolated, too. Without ever staying in one place for too long, it was like we were adrift at sea. We had no close family or friends, just strangers, and by the time we would begin to bond we would be gone, again. Money was tight, too. As soon as I could, I was working. From farm to school custodian, to fast food. I was working before I ever hit high school, and once I was in high school, it was only a year before I dropped out. I couldn't do it then. I couldn't deal with my family, with work, with school, and with myself all at the same time. That was ten years ago and here I am, I feel like in the same place, and I have to do better this time but I know my bad habit is the same. I still get in my own way.

Like Tara I moved away from my family, I have tried to create distance between their bad habits so that hopefully they don't become mine but the lessons linger for me

like that did for her. My surroundings have changed a lot already but not entirely for the best. I'm not just working one job, I'm working two. I'm not just in high school, I'm in college. My family which had been falling apart ten years ago had reached its breaking point and broken away, leaving myself the only stable thing I know and have left while simultaneously the biggest change in my life I have to make. Every external aspect about my life I have tried tirelessly to change because I thought that was the problem. I thought if I moved out, I would be happy. Then I did but I wasn't. I thought if I got my GED and went to college, a dream of mine since I was little, I would feel better then but I don't. It wasn't until I read *Educated*, in those moments where I was frustrated with Tara for clinging to her parents beliefs that I saw how deeply ingrained our past can be into our heads. Even if we know our past is misleading and wrong, it will always be there. Listening to Mel Robbins I saw my own hypocrisy thrown back at me. I was willing to change everything about my life but the one thing I actually had power over, me. It's scary to let go. Who I have always been is someone that was used to being alone, someone who never asked for help. I knew right away when we did an assignment over asking for help this class was going to be tailored fit to me. It was as if I was being called out for my bad habit, my egotistical and arrogant past self who was too prideful to admit my weaknesses and vulnerabilities. As I mentioned before, we think of ourselves as the hero and only now do I see at some point I had become the villain.

Like Mel Robbins said, "Oftentimes we take the easy way out. We don't feel like doing something or we procrastinate and tell ourselves that we will do it later only later never comes and it never gets done." I have lived my life doing what I can just to get by. The bare minimum is all I ever aimed for because ten, twenty years ago that was the best I could get. Tara Westover is a remarkable woman who didn't settle for settling, she

strived to do better even if she didn't know how and that is the spot I am in right now. There is a difference between us, I have her story to learn from but she doesn't have mine. I have resources at my disposal, more background information from early education she didn't have access to. I know about the Holocaust and civil rights, our countries history. I know that grants aren't scams from the government and that vaccines aren't microchips implanted by government spies. I never lived in total isolation like she had and scripture was never perverted and used to justify things that I didn't agree with. We are as different as we are similar because Tara Westover never let the things she went through stop her and I feel as if I had.

I don't think I have changed enough from the person I was. I see a huge metamorphosis in Tara Westover, the kind of change Mel Robbins talks about. When I look at myself, I don't see the same sort of change. Yet. Mel Robbins asked, 'What do you want'. She said anything you want, she can make a plan on how to get there, and I think what I am struggling with the most. is deciding what I want. For now, all I know is that I want change. I want things to be different. I think that is what Tara Westover, author of *Educated*, wanted too. Even if she didn't know it at the time. Through her story, I thought it was strange that it was written from a disconnected, almost apathetic, point of view. Now that I am finished with the story, I realize that it might have been done on purpose, for so much of her story while she was still growing as a person, it was almost as like she was going through the motions. At times, I think we all feel like we are on autopilot, too. We don't know where we are going, we just know that we have to keep going to get there.

Untitled
Morgan Heastan

“You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. Do the thing you think you cannot do.” *Eleanor Roosevelt*. When I saw this quote, it made me think of Tara and myself. Tara had been through so much in her life at such a young age and all alone. She had to stand up to her parents for her to leave and start her own life, she was abused by her brother and even when she went to her parents, they did not believe her. To see how she ended up just shows how much she relates to this quote because she left her toxic home behind her and moved forward with her life. I also relate to this quote because I have dealt with depression for a while now and past family trauma that I have witnessed. I deal with it on my own because I never have truly had someone there for me with good intentions and going through that made me realize that I won't get out of this by the help of anyone else as much as I want the support. Tara Westover and I both struggled with mental health issues in our lives, in part because we allowed people that we love to take too much. However, we both grew from our experience and were able to leave our bad situations.

Mental illness refers to a wide range of mental health conditions. Examples of mental illness include depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, addictive behaviors, and more. I think the amount of trauma that Tara went through definitely will have that lasting impact on her as much as she moves forward from it. Her father dealt with being bipolar which I believe was passed down to Shawn, but Shawn was also

physical and mental abuser. “The thing about having a mental breakdown is that no matter how obvious it is that you're having one, it is somehow not obvious to you. I am fine, you think. So, what if I watched TV for twenty-four straight hours yesterday. I am not falling apart. I am just lazy. Why it is better to think yourself lazy than think yourself in distress, I am not sure. But it was better. More than better: it was vital.” *Tara Westover*. This quote sort of showed me how Tara goes through her mental illness and that she is obviously struggling to deal with it properly. I can relate to this because I dealt with my depression in very unhealthy ways that did not help me better myself. I definitely have come to the realization that I need to push myself to get away from the toxicity in my life and move forward and I believe Tara had that moment of realization as well and that's why she moved away to further her education and she saw how the real world was.

“It's strange how you give the people you love so much power over you.” *Tara Westover*. Tara allowed her father and brother to hold so much power over her she did not believe that she even had a voice to stand up for herself. Shawn is known to be a bully and all-around provocateur especially to Tara. I have let my parents take so much away from me and after so many years of just allowing them to put me down and never able to have a voice of my own and stand up for myself. I allowed them to say things to me that hurt me so much, but I never wanted to say anything because they were my parents, and I did not want to disrespect them. Now I realize that even if they are your parent that they should still treat you with the respect you deserve. I think Tara and I have that in common somewhat because we were too scared to do the opposite of what our parents wanted us to do and we had to come to terms with disappointing them to

make ourselves happy. Tara's brother Shawn abused her mentally and physically. He threatened her life and made her feel as she did not have a voice. Only someone from outside of her life would be able to tell her that what Shawn did was true abuse and he needed consequences from what he did to Tara and his girlfriend. This topic should be talked about more because family abuse is a common thing and there are so many children who don't realize that what they are being put through is not okay and that they should reach out for help.

I believe that Tara and I have both grown from our past's. I think that I have always felt like I needed to please every single person in my life and that it made people end up walking all over me because they knew that they could hurt me and I would still be there for them. I did not have the respect I deserved. "My life was narrated for me by others. Their voices were forceful, emphatic, absolute. It had never occurred to me that my voice might be as strong as theirs." *Tara Westover*. I feel this quote so deeply because I truly never had the confidence that I could speak out and stand up for myself to my family and friends. I believe that Tara was the exact same way as in she tried to be there for her family even though she was mistreated and when she finally left is when she realized that she deserved better and wanted better for herself. Even though you feel like you cant get out of a situation just because you don't want to betray or disappoint someone, do it because you know that the situation you are in is not healthy. I have lost a lot of "friends" because I finally stood up for myself and stopped letting people walk all over me, but that just truly showed me who cared for me and I could not be happier.

Mental Illness is a serious thing, and it should be talked about more. I think Tara Westover is a very strong girl to have gone what she went through and to be where she is

at now. Sometimes people will get so deep into their illness and feel as they do not have anyone, and it can turn out badly. That is why I think it needs to become more aware, especially for people to look for the signs to be there for their family member or friend because some people are too afraid to speak out. I do not think too many people notice when one is showing the signs of a call for help. “The struggle you are in today is developing the strength you need tomorrow.” I think this quote is very true because even though you are going through the worst situation, if you just fight through the battle and fight until the end you will overcome it all and become stronger and a better you.

Communication vs. Excommunication

Jessica Hodges

Tara Westover is an American woman who has overcome incredible life circumstances and has chosen to share the story of her transformation from obedient child to independent scholar through her book, *Educated*. Growing up, Westover did not receive any formal education; any “schooling” she had was at the hands of her mother (46). She did not set foot in a classroom until she was seventeen years old (148). Westover was raised in a home with various kinds of neglect and abuse. When she was a teenager, she worked for her father in a junkyard (54). Tara’s father had little regard for safety, often putting her in precarious situations (55, 63, 138). His religious beliefs paired with his likely mental health issues often led him to shame and try to control Tara (4, 207). Her mother often bent to the will of Tara’s father (15, 80). Her brother, Shawn, was physically and emotionally abusive; he would assault her and call her names (115). There is a point in *Educated* when Tara writes in her journal about an incident with Shawn in the parking lot of a grocery store. She was home for Christmas break and had been working with her brother on a roofing job in Franklin when they decided to take a break (192). When they arrived at the store, Tara noticed a friend’s jeep nearby. She was dirty from working and decided she did not want to go inside and risk her friend seeing her that way (192). Her refusal to go in angered her brother, who dragged her out of the car, threw her down, and exposed her underclothes (193). Tara screamed and sobbed and begged to be let go, but her brother did not heed her pleas (193). He pulled her up, twisted her wrist behind her back, and painfully bent it until it cracked; he did this until Tara agreed to go inside (194). In her journal that night, Tara

questioned why Shawn hadn't stopped. She wrote, "Could he not tell he was hurting me? I don't know. I just don't know." Westover writes, "... what had I whispered and what had I screamed? I decide that if I had asked differently, been more calm, he would have stopped" (194). These are familiar thoughts. Did he just not understand? Could I have been clearer? Why does he continue to hurt me despite my protestations? Tara, like me, will eventually learn that it does not matter how you ask your abusers not to abuse you; it matters that you remove yourself from the situation.

It is easy to tell ourselves that if we could simply convey our point of view in a way our oppressors could understand, then they would listen, and the pain would stop. It's a simple thought process. We assume that everyone wants the best for each other because the alternative is unthinkable; there are people who *want* to hurt us. When I was involved with a man named John, he hurt me. He didn't do it with his body, but he did it with words and the intentions attached to them. Tara's abusers hurt her physically, mentally, and emotionally. Perhaps her father wasn't trying to harm her; perhaps his intentions were the best. Perhaps his mental illness made it difficult for him to express his love in a healthy, non-controlling way without the help of a mental health professional. Perhaps Shawn could have been a better person with therapy. Neither of them received that help when Tara was a part of their lives; She was left to protect herself from the abuses heaped upon her by the very people who were supposed to love and support her. When it feels like you are the only one who can change the situation, the situation starts to feel like it is your fault. When I was with John, I learned about something called "Nonviolent Communication," or NVC. NVC is supposed to be a tool to help people communicate. It is supposed to help people navigate their disagreements in a way that is not accusatory and focuses on the feelings and needs of the participants

instead of the perceived wrongs. What I found using NVC in an emotionally abusive relationship was that I worked twice as hard to state my observations and explain my thoughts and feelings. I couldn't tell him he was wrong in his actions because that would be accusatory and would cause more problems. Using NVC in this way did reduce some conflict, but only in that it made them shorter and John had to be more precise in his own accusations. If Tara had known about NVC and tried to use it with her family, it would not have mattered. NVC only works when all involved parties want to change the dynamic and stop hurting each other. Shawn *wanted* to see Tara humiliated (195). The pleasure Shawn gleaned from tormenting his sister would not have been chased away by her stating observations and using different phrases to describe her feelings, shifting from language like, "Please let me go!" to, "This is hurting me!" It wouldn't matter because her feelings were not the point; his pleasure was.

Throughout *Educated*, Westover details how her pursuance of an education gradually created distance between her, her father, and Shawn. Tara applied to Brigham Young University when she was only sixteen years old; she was 17 when she started attending college classes (148). While her mother was supportive of Tara pursuing an education, her father was not (125, 132). He said she was "whoring after man's knowledge instead of God's" (125). The summer following her first semester at BYU, her father and Shawn both accused her of thinking she was "too good" to do the same work they did (167, 175). She was becoming an independent thinker, and this did not sit well with them. After graduating from BYU, Tara attended Cambridge at Trinity College (255). While at Cambridge, Tara started to actively reject the ideas of her father and the religion she had been raised in; she went to get vaccinated, and tried coffee for the first time (257, 258). She began to read feminist literature, and realized that a woman did not

have to fit predefined roles (258). Tara's evolution of thought reminds me of my own. When I first met John, who I was involved with for the better part of eight years, I didn't have many firmly held political beliefs. John was a very political person and introduced me to new schools of thought that became a large part of how I lived my life for the next few years. During the span of our relationship, though, our political ideologies diverged. It became obvious that he was fine with controlling other people as long as he was the one in control, while I had become a proponent for equity and autonomy. He didn't like this change in me. I was no longer his political student, much like Tara was no longer just her father's daughter. The changes in my thinking created a rift in my relationship with John; the changes in Tara's thinking created distance between her and the more controlling parts of her family.

The chain of events that led to Tara finally separating herself from the more toxic members of her family is a long one. There were threats from Shawn to both Tara and their sister, Audrey (282, 286). Her parents insisted he wasn't serious and blamed Tara. Even when Shawn slaughtered a dog with a small knife, handed the bloody blade to Tara, and encouraged her to use it on herself, her parents defended him (286, 291). Her mother went so far as denying it ever happened (292). Her brother went on to harass and threaten her repeatedly before eventually telling her to leave him and his family alone, cutting ties with her himself (291). To add insult to injury, her parents visited her during her fellowship at Harvard so that her father could attempt to "save" her (299). If she would only accept his blessing, forgive Shawn, forget all the harm he had caused her, and accept him as a changed man, then everything could go back to normal. If she would accept her father's view of the situation, betraying herself in the process, she could have her family back (299). When Tara refused, her parents left

(304). She saw them once more before realizing she needed to take time to heal (312). A year passed before she reached out to ask her mother to meet with her; she wasn't ready to see her father yet. Her mother refused; she would not meet Tara without Tara's father present (312). Outside of them being across the room at her grandmother's funeral, Westover has not seen her parents since (322, 325). For all their talk of wanting to save her, Tara's parents had effectively abandoned her, choosing instead to support her abusive brother. Yet her mother still seemed to think her choice to distance from them was unreasonable. When I left him, John didn't think I was being reasonable either. He didn't understand why it was so hard for me to just be what he wanted me to be; why couldn't I just be more submissive to him, give up my own desires, and do the things he wanted me to do? Surely it was that easy! However, I was not about to sacrifice who I am to continue a relationship with John, much like Tara would not betray herself to maintain a relationship with her parents and her brother.

As told in *Educated*, Tara Westover saved herself much the same way I did. She didn't do it by changing how she spoke to her abusers; she did it by removing herself from the situation. When I tried changing the way I spoke to John, it did not change the dynamic between us. Leaving him was the only way to protect myself from the damage he seemed determined to do. For Tara, It took years of learning about the world around her and awful interactions with certain family members who did not like the changes in her. She came to see how different the world outside of Buck's Peak was compared to the picture of the world her parents had painted for her. She realized she did not deserve the damaging treatment her family had been directing at her throughout her life, and that continuing to allow it would be a betrayal of herself. Tara realized she deserved better. For me, it took years of emotional abuse, reading about methods of

communication, and the realization that it didn't matter how well-spoken I was because John was not seeking to understand me, but to control me. I deserve better. I deserve to live my life on my own terms. That is what I left to do, and now I am free to do so. As of 2018, Westover was no longer in contact with Shawn or her father. After roughly ten years of seeking education, the distance between her and her family widening, and the abuses escalating, Tara Westover freed herself. We both did.

Overcoming Obstacles

Madeline Kochenderfer

You can never be overeducated. In the book *Educated* by Tara Westover, I think that Tara is the main reason why her family split apart. Tara was raised on a restrained farm in Idaho called Buck's Peak. She knew very little about education due to completely trusting what her father told her. Tara started to expand her basic knowledge to create a way out of physical danger at her home. Eventually her actions and choices start to overestimate the way she has been raised by her parents. Tara is very compassionate about her education and family that it starts to demolish her connection with her family. Fighting back and forth for both lives she wants to live Tara could only choose one. From having to choose between family and education I believe that Tara did exactly what she was supposed to do. Tara was motivated to get a degree and expand her knowledge of the world and she did just that. Education gives us such a great look on life including potentially earning more money, becoming more independent and gives you more confidence. Family is very important to have but you can't be letting them control your life and let them hold you back on accomplishments.

Westovers have a very interesting life they all have lived. They worked for father at his junkyard in their own backyard. It wasn't your typical day job at work either, it involved weekly accidents. One specific accident was when father forced Tara to get inside a bin that they just loaded with iron to settle it. As Tara is inside the bin father begins to move the bin and this causes Tara to be pinned against metal "the spike was still embedded in my leg, dragging me downward" (pg 64), and in result leaves Tara with a huge gash on her leg. For any injuries they were so used to walking back home

and letting mother heal them. No matter how much blood or how severe the accident was they always knew to go home. Mother swore that she had a healing power and could heal anyone with her oils that she would make in her house. Tara always had an idea in the back of her mind that mothers oils didn't work because it would never lessen the pain or make her heal faster but she kept those thoughts to herself. Father shared many concerns about the End of Days and he shared his lectures to his family often. So often that Tara didn't know anything different so she had no other choice but to believe what he said. Eventually when Tara starts to expand her education she learns that there are plenty of events that her father has never brought up before.

Tara had studied an enormous amount of times for the ACT she was going to take. Waiting with her test results she passed. This opened up an opportunity for her to explore the real world and get to know other people. At first she was very nervous to go and try because her parents did not believe in schools. When Tara got accepted into BYU her parents knew they had to do something about it. When she would visit back home her father tried making her work in the junkyard and when she refused to he kicked her out of the house. Father was not going to allow her to work elsewhere when he needed help the most. Tara knew that if she helped her father in the junkyard that her life she was starting to create without them would definitely go back and be the same little girl she was before she left. She fell into her fathers trap once again and started working for him until her next semester at school. When leaving for school again Taras father buys her a car for some of the money he owes her for working and sends her off. Tara is now starting to notice how different the world is attending her school. She meets several people and professors at her school and is beginning to realize everything her parents have kept from her. Historical events that have taken place she

knew absolutely nothing about them. It felt like Tara was in a different universe but in all reality it was how she was raised. Since she has been learning about a lot of new topics a word has stuck in her mind and reminded her of her father, bipolar. Next time she saw her father she confronted him about all the events she has learned and asked for an explanation of it all. Father was speechless. This was the beginning of a long process that caused the family to separate. Since starting college she has not returned to home that summer.

Westovers had many arguments and disagreements with each other that not all families would have. Father was definitely the man in charge at home because he made all the decisions. If father didn't like something he would get it changed and if he did like something so did everyone else. Nobody liked to be on Fathers bad side since he was the man of the household. When the family started to shun Tara her father gave her an ultimatum. To stop attending school and work in the junkyard or to not bother him and his family again. Tara didn't know what to pick because she always relied on her family. She didn't have friends or acquaintances to rely on. She knew what was best for her and decided to swallow the hurt from her family and continue with school. In the essay *An Insider's view of the life of a first-generation scholar* by Herb Childress he explains how difficult it is to go to school when you are not academically prepared. "Such students are often not only less academically prepared than their fellows but also share little of the cultural capital" (pg 1), this relates to Tara so well because even after confronting her Father about proven history moments he had nothing else to say.

Buck's Peak was changed besides the beautiful face of the mountain. One last time after Tara completely finished up school and got her Phd she wanted to see her parents one last time. Unfortunately the feeling wasn't mutual to her parents. Tara knew

that her family had a very big spot in her heart but she was determined to be somebody. She didn't want to live the life some of her siblings and parents were living. Being able to see the outside world Tara decided a very successful path for herself. It was a very rocky road to follow and she sometimes got off track but she kept going to the very end. Father made it very difficult for the rest of his family to have their own opinions. The expansion of craving knowledge is what tore this family apart. Tara was strong enough to overpower it and become independent.

Do We Really Know Our Family Like We Think We Do?

Katelyn Koehler

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to get abused by your own family members? Really think about it, those people are the ones who you grew up with your entire life. Never in a million years would you ever think they would hurt you, physically and verbally. In Tara Westover's case she can easily answer that question. In Tara's book, *Educated* she is a victim of abuse. This abuse doesn't just come from her parents but mainly from her own brother, Shawn. He is physically and verbally abusive towards her and her parents don't realize what their own son is doing to their own daughter. They physically see it all happen but don't care enough to stop it. She suffers in these situations and then she finally realizes she needs to get away. She needs to better her life and get away from it all, and that's exactly what she does. Lauren Book, from the Ted Talk, *From Victim to Survivor* goes through what Tara went through. But, in her case it was her own nanny, Waldy, as she called her. Her parents, on the other hand, had no idea it was happening and she thought it was best to keep it a secret because she thought it was all her fault. Lauren, just like Tara, got away from the abuse she experienced as a child, she couldn't take it anymore. The fact that her own Nanny abused her almost everyday was wrong and Lauren knew it was wrong. After 6 long, terrible years, she finally spoke up about it all. She told her parents and her siblings to make it all stop, and it eventually did. She then, years later, grew up and married her husband, someone she loves and feels protected by. We think our family members are the safest, most protective people to be around, but they can change our minds in just seconds. Physical and verbal abuse is real and it can happen to anyone by anyone, even

our own family members. But, you can escape it, just like these two women did. You can get away from it all and live the life you want and deserve. It all starts with you, the one being abused, you have to speak up and take action for yourself, just like Tara and Lauren did.

In Lauren Book's Ted Talk she explains the abusive situations she had with Waldy. One particular kind of abuse she explained was verbal abuse, which affected how she felt on the inside. These verbal abusive things that Waldy would say to her would bring her down, make her feel like it was all her fault that this was happening. These close family members don't realize that what they say to us, we all take it differently, but it always comes back as abusive in some way shape or form. That is how Lauren, a 12 year old little girl at the time, took it. In her Ted Talk "From Victim to Survivor: Find Your X...but First, Find Your (Wh)Y?" Book says, "Waldy was a skilled predator and would say things to feed into these feelings of guilt, self doubt, and ensure my silence, my submission and her complete control." Waldy then said to Lauren, "If you tell, no one will believe you!" "They'll send you away, they would be so ashamed of you. You don't want that baby, do you?" (7:41-8:03) This is how Waldy would tie her down. She would say these things so she knew in the back of her head, Lauren would never have the chance to leave her or tell anyone. Waldy had complete control over Lauren and Lauren didn't know how to react. She knew she could do nothing or things between her and Waldy would get even worse than they already were. So, she kept her word about it and didn't say anything to anyone. Abusers say verbal things to their prey so they feel a sense of control over them. They want them to feel like they can't do anything, they want them to feel scared, worried, neglected. This is exactly how Lauren felt.

Tara Westover also experienced a lot of verbal abuse from her own older brother, Shawn, who would use phrases and words to bring her down, make her feel like she was controlled by him in any way possible. The first verbal abuse comment Shawn made to Tara was the first time she ever wore makeup. She wanted to try what all the rest of the girls her age were doing, and that was wearing makeup. Shawn took it the wrong way and said, “I thought you were better,” he said. “But you’re just like the rest” (Westover 114). Tara didn’t know what to think about this response but she immediately wiped it off and went on her way. The first time she wore lipgloss he also had a comment to make. “Shawn said I was a whore,” (Westover 114). After that reply she wiped all of it from her lips and again, went on her way. Shawn got to Tara in any way he could so she would feel down and upset. This is what abusers want, they want to feel like they control everything you do and if you don’t do what they want, they will always come back with a hurtful comment that will bring you down and change the way you do things so it will satisfy them. Tara thinks that because it’s her brother she has to do what he says and he’s not doing it to be abusive towards her, but he is just simply trying to protect her in any way he can. That is not the case, he says these things to her so he can basically control her life. He is an abuser, verbally, to his own little sister.

When one is being abused by another family member, to be specific, they don’t always know how to react. Do you fight back? Do you let them just keep doing it to you? Think about it, if you were in Tara or Lauren’s shoes what would be your initial reaction? In her Ted Talk “From Victim to Survivor: Find your X...but First, Your (Wh)Y?” Book says, “During acts of terror some have the natural instinct to fight. Adrenaline kicks in, clarity is found in chaos, thoughts connect to action and well you simply fight like hell to survive! Others have a natural urge and instinct tending toward

flight. To literally remove themselves from the traumatic situation by any means possible, to get the f out! The third F, freeze. You tune out, black out, your mind leaves your body behind or sometimes the experience, the thoughts, the feelings, and the senses become heightened. But you are stuck paralyzed, unable to react, frozen, waiting for the pain to end” (0:41-1:36). The three F’s are the reactions each person takes. Everyone’s reaction is different, they could experience all three, two, or just one in particular. For Lauren she has one in particular, she freezes. She is unable to react and she doesn’t know what to do besides to keep letting Waldy do what she does to her. Many people, including myself, would be the one to freeze in this type of situation. Most people are shocked, surprised that these people that they truly care about and love would ever do these types of things to them. Lauren was one of those people. As a 12 year old little girl, she didn’t know what to do, besides keep letting it happen. Think about if you were a 12 year old, would you react the same way she did, just automatically freeze in shock?

For Tara Westover, physical abuse was something she experienced quite a bit. Just like Lauren, Tara froze in every physical, abusive situation she was in with Shawn. She let it happen because she thought if she fought back, he would fight harder. In the book *Educated* Tara said, “Two hands gripping my throat, and they’d been shaking me. The needles, that was my brain crashing into my skull. I had only a few seconds to wonder why before the needles returned, shredding my thoughts. My eyes were open but I saw only white flashes. A few sounds made it through to me,” (Westover 116). “Then another sound. Mother. She was crying. “Stop! You’re killing her! Stop!” (Westover 116). This is when Shawn basically chokes Tara almost to death. Her mother is just letting it happen. Yes she may say to stop but she has to realize that Shawn won’t

stop no matter what she says to him. Tara doesn't know what to do in this situation so she freezes. It's hard to try to fight back when someone is choking you so hard you can't even see straight. Then he drags her by her hair down the hallway. She is shaken up and she doesn't know what to do. She is just waiting for the pain to end. In her book *Educated* Tara said, "In it I saw myself as unbreakable, as tender as stone" (Westover 111). Shawn's abusive behavior towards her didn't affect her in any way because in her words, "nothing affected me," (Westover 111). She was so used to the pain he would cause her. She was frozen and in shock in every situation she was in with him. She knew it was going to happen and she knew she couldn't stop it, if she fought back, he fought harder. Every physical, abusive situation Tara is in, Shawn always comes back to her and apologizes and says how sorry he is. Then Tara accepts the apology and then Shawn knows he can do it any time he wants and she will always forgive him. This is the mind control that Shawn has over Tara. He knows that he can keep doing it and she won't say anything. For one she is shocked and doesn't know how to react so he will feel like he has control over her.

Both Tara and Lauren go through these physical and verbal abusive situations with their family members and they both come out on top. They grow up and get away from it all, but these experiences never leave them. They will always be in the back of their minds for the rest of their lives. Tara becomes a very successful person with a college degree and Lauren successfully becomes an elementary teacher. Lauren became a teacher because she wants to protect children if they were getting abused just like her at that age. She wanted to be able to answer the question of why the abusers would want to do that to children. She went through it and she doesn't want to see any one of them go through it too. In her Ted Talk "From Victim to Survivor: Find your X...but First,

Your (Wh)Y?” Book says, “I went to school to become a teacher because I wanted to protect children in ways I was unable to be kept safe. I looked closely at my students and tried to figure out the root causes of their challenges. I began digging a little deeper and asking why for them and for me,” (12:08-12:30). Digging deeper into this abuse made her want to protect the children in her class even more. Lauren is now the CEO and founder of the Lauren’s Kids Foundation which helps children who were and are being abused. Tara earned her college degree and is now a successful person. Both these women share their stories for others to read and watch so others can hear their stories. They want to make a difference in someone’s life that is going through the same thing they went through. Really think about how your family members treat you. We may think they are the most important people in our life, but they could make us think something different in the amount of minutes. Physical and verbal abuse is nothing to play around with. If you think you are being abused in any way by your family members, spouse, friend, tell someone. It won’t only help them, it will help you out in the long run. Tara and Lauren overcame it and bettered themselves every single day they could, they are now very successful and you can be as well.

The God's Eye
By Nicole Krzyzaniak

In Tara Westover's "*Educated*," she talks about growing up at Buck's Peak, escaping from her family's grasp, and the violence she endured. Tara searches for change as she distances herself from her family. It's a harrowing story of life a young woman goes through to find herself, religion, and education. Much like Tara, my grandmother was a woman, much too similar to Tara's family. I learned like Tara; you can choose to distance yourself from toxic family members, find your own path, and stray from the teaching. Your own family can brainwash you into their beliefs. No one, including family, should decide a religion for you, and everyone has a choice on which direction to take; my grandma on my father's side was strict with her teaching.

My grandmother's teachings were uncivilized to everyone else's outlook at her own church. As attending church in her hometown was something she could preach about, not everyone believed in the same thing. Similarly to Westover, she reveals, "As a child, I'd been aware that although my family attended the same church as everyone in our town, our religion was not the same" (159). My grandmother's religion was not the same, as people believe in different things. "They believed in modesty; we practiced it. They believed in God's power to heal; we left our injuries in God's hands" (159). As a child praying was the answer to everything live and breathed through the Bible. In Tara's story, I can relate to her because my grandmother was anything but holy in God's eyes, as she sees from another viewpoint. She drove her views on to people; women couldn't wear pants, only dresses below the knee, shirts could not be tight-fitting as God wouldn't want you to be indecent. You left the power in God's hands to heal you. My

grandma fought with others; she believed that her views were the right ones to follow. Much like Tara, my young mind was brainwashed as going to “Hell” wasn't an option for me. I had to follow and do what my grandmother expected of me. I traveled down to see my birth father and grandma every other weekend, and I made sure to pack appropriately, clothes that would be considered modestly approved. I did not want to feel the wrath of my grandmother.

My grandmother would say God spoke to her. She had to spread his message to the people at her church. I never really believed her; I just thought she was crazy, and I imagine the churchgoers thought so as well. Similarly to Westover, she reveals, “God told dad to share the revelation with the people who lived and farmed in the shadows of Buck’s Peak” (5). Each time my grandma would read from the Bible at church. “With each repetition, the pitch of his voice climbed higher” (4). Growing up around my grandmother was constant teachings and discipline. What to do and how to do it, respectively. I can relate to this quote because my grandma would raise her voice above yours when you talked over her or questioned her. My grandmother used a phrase when I got angry or if I would speak back. She said to “keep sweet,” you don’t want to be a woman that disobey God’s work. “Keep sweet” was a term that Warren Jeffs, a cult leader, used in Utah’s polygamist Mormon fundamentalist community base, also known as the FLDS. She idolizes his work and teachings. My grandmother would go to church on Sunday and explain her knowledge from the Bible or God himself. With a repetitive voice with each passage she read, my grandmother would continuously repeat herself if you did not understand the first time. Loudly as she talks, she wanted to make sure everyone heard! She was controlling. Like Tara’s father, my grandmother wanted to make a statement when she’d spread her views. As I grew older, coming down every

other weekend was dreadful. I was tired of my grandmother pushing her religion on me and others. I still lower my voice when I get angry or disagree.

When I turned thirteen, I was tired of it all, the religion my grandmother fought with me, the consistent reminder of dressing and looking modesty the abuse. My mother had said she left my birth father because my grandma was too controlling and abused her. I had a choice to make, and my mother was there with her guidance. When I did not listen to my grandma, she would grab my arm with much force, letting me know I disobeyed her. I question her motives as to why her teachings were a necessity. Furthermore, Westover predicts, “ She had grabbed my arm and whispered that my refusing to see our father was a grave sin. He is a great man, for the rest of your life you will regret not humbling yourself and following his counsel” (325). I was scared. My grandma was family and to refuse her work or not seeing her was a sin. She told me it was a grave sin God had told her to relay the message to me. My father never did anything to help. He was a slave to my grandmother’s work. Much like Westover, she explains “When I was a child, I waited for my mind to grow, for my experiences to accumulate, and my choices solidify, taking shape into the likeness of a person. That person, or that likeness of one, had belonged” (327). I defend this quote from Westover; as a child, I wanted to grow into my own self. To look past the only world my grandma thought of. I didn’t want to think about the end of the world; God’s work consisted of yelling my grandmother did at me. I was passionate about learning other things about this world. But to get there was to distance myself further from my grandmother. She knew I was not like her and never wanted to be a foot soldier to God’s army.

Coming of age was a time of healing, self-taught, and self-worth. My grandmother resented me, told me I was going to Hell. I wasn’t worthy of God’s power. I

knew she was wrong; her teachings were false. I wasn't the woman she wanted me to be. Much like Westover, she admits, "That peace did not come easily. I spent two years enumerating my father's flaws, constantly updating the tally, as if reciting every resentment, every real and imagined act of cruelty, of neglect, would justify my decision to cut him from my life" (327). In my teens, peace was inevitable towards my self-worth. My grandma lashed at me, hit me for speaking out of context. I broke free of my grandmother, but my grandmother did not break free of me. She would continuously call me; she told me my decision was wrong every day she let me know. "I shed my guilt when I accepted my decision on its own terms, without endlessly prosecuting old grievances, without weighing his sins against mine. I made the decision for my own sake" (328). Westover recalls the guilt she felt as I felt the guilt myself. We both decided to leave a toxic person in our life to find one another. I had accepted my grandma for her flaws but not taken the decision she had for the people around her or me. I would follow my path of spiritual guidance, not with my grandma's help but my own; the abuse she inflicted on me for many years, both physical and mental.

Coming to terms with myself was hard, but cutting my grandmother out of my life was inevitable. I learned her teachings were false from a young age. God would want you to walk your own path; his teaching wasn't meant for self-destruction. It's up to you to decide there's a bigger world out there. Staying true to yourself is one thing that kept me going. Family is everything, but when that family member is brainwashing and controlling, you need to take a step back and say no one, including family, should decide your future or path. I think religion is self-discovery. Everyone has the right to believe, and practice what they choose. It's been eleven years that I haven't spoken to my

grandmother. The guilt I feel every day for it weighs on me heavily. But I tell myself it was necessary to heal.

Abuse
Brooklynn Leal

Abuse, it comes in many shapes and sizes. For the most part you only hear about physical abuse and the lasting effects it has on a person. Rarely do you hear about the impacts of emotional abuse and how often it truly occurs. Through the book *Educated* by Tara Westover you learn all about Westover's childhood and her encounters with physical and emotional abuse. Westover tells her story of abuse and the struggle of learning to live with the trauma. Like Westover my mom has her own abuse story, one that came in and completely shifted our family dynamic. My mom has spent years trying to move on from the emotional abuse; we as a family are still learning how to move on. Emotional abuse impacts the way you see yourself and how you interpret things being said to you, it causes you to believe that things are not as they seem.

The first few months of a relationship are often the best, filled with so much learning and fun. But after those few months you begin to take the masks off, showing each other the truth of who you are. Someone you have grown to love can completely change within seconds to this new form you no longer recognize. Westover's older brother, Shawn, had played a game with the girls in his life. One that would test how obedient they were, he would ask for one thing and when they came back he would act as if he had asked for something completely different. This would go on for as little as 30 minutes before he finally felt satisfied. He had never done this to Westover until one night Shawn had come home in a disturbing mood, "Shawn plopped down next to me 'get me a glass of water', 'you break your leg?' I said 'get it or I won't drive you to town tomorrow'. I fetched the water"(Westover 109). This was the first moment in their

relationship where Shawn began to hold power over Westover, when the mind games first began. Similarly to Westover's story, my mom was faced with a shift in her relationship. Within the months after my parents split my mom started seeing a guy named Sean, just some random man she met online. He often made himself out to be a good guy by showering her and us in many expensive gifts. One night they were out with friends and he made a comment about how she had been the biggest girl he had ever been with. This, on top of the fact that she had just found out that my dad left her for a woman much thinner than she was, threw her into a downward spiral. Like my mom, Westover had experienced something that altered the way she acted, it instilled fear in her. Westover now feared her brother, someone who before had done nothing but protect her. In this single moment she lost the ability to stick up for herself. Both her and my mom had been beaten down in just moments.

Physical abuse is often laced with emotional abuse. Abusers use their fists to scare into submission but it is their words that will leave a lasting affect. Aaron, a man that walked into our lives in one of our weakest moments My grandfather had died just shortly after he and my mom started their relationship. After my dad left I never thought it was possible for someone to come into our life and hurt us the way he did. A few months into Aaron and my mom's relationship, he got violent, he'd get so drunk his words would slur and he could barely walk but he was still stronger than my mom. He'd push and shove her shouting some of the most hateful words, "WHORE!" "FAT B!TCH" Most nights he stayed over I would wake up in the middle of the night to the screaming. He would break in while everyone was gone and leave hateful notes for my mom to find. My mom raised three kids on her own and within a matter of months this man had broken her down to someone who no longer knew how to stand up for herself. Like my

mom, Westover was called hateful names by someone she loves. “Shawn came into my room unexpectedly and found me smudging my eyelashes with audreys old mascara ‘you wear makeup now?’ he said ‘I guess’ he spun around to leave but paused in the doorframe “I thought you were better’ he said ‘but you’re just like the rest’ he stopped calling me siddel lister ‘let's go fisheyes’...”(Westover 114). Fish eyes had been a name he called girls who only did things for attention, girls who, in his opinion, didn’t have a brain. This caused Westover to lose confidence in herself, she feared becoming one of ‘those girls’. The words that Aaron and Shawn used towards Westover and my mom affected the way they saw themselves. They only saw themselves for what their abusers saw, they were bullied into believing that they were weak and unworthy of kindness. Both Westover and my mom believed they would never be good enough unless they changed themselves.

Emotional abuse causes people to believe that they are the problem, that they are the ones that are making it worse, that it truly is having to reteach your brain to see things for how they truly are and can take years. During her last few years of college, Westover seeks her family's help in confronting Shawn about his repeated abuse towards his sisters and wife. At first it had seemed like her family was going to stick by her. It was later revealed that it wasn’t so when Westover received a message from her sister claiming she was mad and had filled her brain with works of the devil. That she no longer felt anger towards her brother and that she should move on This caused Audrey to ignore her past with shawn out of fear of losing her family . Receiving this message only confirmed the things her family had been trying to convince Westover, that she was crazy and lacked the ability to decipher fact from fiction, “I began to differ, always to the judgement of others. If Drew remembered something differently then I did, would

immediately concede the point. I began to rely on Drew to tell me the facts of our lives.”(Westover 294). The doubt of her family caused Westover to lean on everyone around her. She had developed the feeling of constantly being wrong like in some way her mind had just simply not been able to see what was real and what was not. It also strongly affected her schooling, she had lost all motivation to try any harder, she had given up and spent her time watching television. This went on for years after her family turned their backs to her. In *‘Eight Ways Emotional Abuse Traumatizes You’* by Phych2Go you learn that emotional abuse can take years to get past, and more often than not you may not realize that you are suffering. The speaker begins by talking about the eight ways emotional abuse traumatizes you, “It takes a long time to recover from the emotional trauma that results from emotional abuse can be felt for much longer than any sort of physical pain. Where physical pain can eventually heal, psychological scars often stay with you for life.” You convince yourself that you are what is wrong, you tell yourself you are the crazy one. Westover struggled for many years deciphering from real and not real, because she had been told by so many people in her family that she was ill and she began to believe it to be true. As we learn from the video it is often a silent battle between you and your brain.

Emotional abuse takes a hold of someone's soul morphing them into this unrecognizable person. Breaking free of the pain takes years and even when you think it no longer has a hold over you, the words and the fear comes creeping back in. Westover spent years trying to overcome the emotional trauma because once she finally broke free from the hold her family had over her, she excelled in her schooling, “Finally as summer turned to fall I found I could read with focus. I could hold thoughts in my head besides anger and self accusation.”(Westover 317). After months of counseling Westover had

finally been free enough to resume getting her PHD, after graduating and becoming Dr. Tara Westover, she moved back to London. She broke the chains that had been weighing her down for years, she was finally free. Unlike Westover, my mom still struggles daily. Soon after Aaron walked into our life, my mom fell into a downward spiral of anger and pain. She transferred jobs further away from him, which in result caused us to lose our house. She built walls so high that it took years for her current boyfriend to break down. Aaron walked into our lives and completely disrupted the balance. My mom has spent years trying to get over the trauma. It is the moments when we find pieces of him, like a hateful note from him left in a notebook, that bring her back to that place.

Emotional abuse not only impacts who you are but also your perception of the world. Abuse can come out of nowhere causing a shock within you. It leaves you with no room to react, you are left wondering what you did wrong. Emotional abuse is often what leaves the deepest wounds, abusers use their words to tear down what self confidence is there. In *Educated* by Tara Westover she tells how the words her family used against her affected her view on the world. How her memories became tainted with lies and she lost the ability to see the truth. My mom lost the ability to be the strong woman she had become. The abuse my mom faced not only affected her but it impacted all of us, still to this day I see my little sister tense at the sound of a truck driving by late at night or the way my heart races when the people around me are drunk. It's been almost four years since the last time I spoke to Aaron but he still has power over my family and I. Abusers will use their words to convince people that they are the crazy ones, that they deserve what they have gotten. You may not always know you are being abused until looking back years later. Abuse holds power over someone, it can cause their version of reality to be tainted.

Mental Illness: The Real Story

Caden Romer

In his Ted Talk, Vikram Patel stated 1 in 4 people are affected by mental illness every day of their lives. After reading the fantastic novel *Educated* by Tara Westover, I decided that mental health is a global issue. In the novel, Tara grows up with Mormon survivalist parents. She is often mentally and physically abused. I believe her abuse stems from her father's own mental health struggles. Tara suffers from her dad's mental health problems and that of her own. My situation is shockingly similar to Tara. My dad suffers from schizophrenia from years of alcoholism, which has caused my own mental health struggles. Mental health as discussed in *Educated* hits close to home. My own story and that of so many other people around the world is why we should discuss the issue of mental health and mental illness.

Tara and I have many similarities in our own mental health struggles. Both our father's names are Gene, and they both suffer from schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is a severe mental illness that is characterized by delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, and behavior. Throughout the novel, Gene starts exerting signs of schizophrenia, such as his phase where he became a doomsday prepper. Tara states, "He was an even-keeled man and then became an end-of-the-world prepper consumed by an uncontrollable drive to ready him and his family for the end of days'(Westover 45). Often Tara would think about how her father was "before". How he used to be, not this senial old man. This statement by Tara shows just how concerned she was about his mental health. Throughout the novel, we get glimpses of just how poor genes mental health actually was. After reading *Educated*, I found myself standing in

Tara's shoes. Then I came to recognize I'd been in her shoes all my life. My father suffers from alcoholism just like his father before him. If the alcoholism wasn't enough, he started developing severe schizophrenia from his drinking habits. Leading to me dealing with his paranoia episodes repeatedly. This disease has affected me dramatically, just as it has Tara. My life will never be the same after being introduced to this disease.

Depression affected my life the most out of any mental illness. The events in my life from my father, and my step father hurt me forever. Tara deals with depression from her family just as I have. Her family abuses her, and traps her in their mountainside prison. The Indian Princess means nothing but absolute sadness for Tara. Yet her biggest struggles come in college. She almost doesn't achieve her goal of getting a Ph.D. In *Educated* Tara says, "The thing about having a mental breakdown is that no matter how obvious it is that you're having one, it is somehow not obvious to you. I'm fine, you think. So what if I watched TV for twenty-four straight hours yesterday. I'm not falling apart. I'm just lazy. Why it's better to think yourself lazy than think yourself in distress, I'm not sure. But it was better. More than better: it was vital(Westover 251). I feel Tara's pain precisely, this is exactly what I felt. In my darkest hours of depression I didn't want to get out of bed or do anything at all. I felt as if the life had been sucked straight out of my body, and there was absolutely nothing that could bring it back. The darkest time in my life was when I tore my ACL. The sport I've loved my whole entire life was taken from me, not only that but I was left with a useless leg. I remember looking down right after I came to light with myself after surgery, and the first thing I see is the mangled shell of my once fully functional appendage. My legs and speed up until this point were my trademark. I went from a top tier competitor to a cripple in a matter of seconds. It

took me a lump sum of time to realize that my life was going to be different forever. This event caused me extreme depression but it'll never amount to the pain my family has brought me. Tara and I have dealt with depression directly coming from our family relations. In my Powerpoint, I show the importance of family relations and mental health. My father recently being arrested directly affected my mental health. According to Vikram Patel one in four people or someone close to them suffer from depression. It is the leading cause of illness next to back pain, and allergies. Tara and I have dealt with depression, but so have millions of other people in the world.

Being bi polar is similar to Missouri's weather, one minute it's snowing the next it's 70 degrees outside. In the novel Tara deals with her brother Shawn's bi polar tendencies. He'd often physically and mentally abuse Tara, strangling her and calling her vulgar names such as slut, negro, and hooker. He probably inherited his mental illness from his father. I believe it motivates his violent and aggressive actions. Shawn is very night and day he is eager to assert power, especially over women. He abuses Tara after she starts to show signs of independence and growing up. Shawn is a bully who wants to crush Tara's spirit, and he takes pleasure in breaking her spirit and ransacking her happiness. Shawn's violent behavior is consistent throughout the book he abuses every woman in his life. He continues this even after he gets married and has a family. Shawn would often commit these violent actions toward Tara, then show sympathy the next day. This brings to light his mental health struggles, especially him being bi polar. In the novel she expresses her bitterness towards Shawn in a quote stating, "I stood and quietly locked the bathroom door, then I stared into the mirror at the girl clutching her wrist. Her eyes were glassy and drops slid down her cheeks. I hated her for her weakness, for having a heart to break. That he could hurt her, that anyone could hurt

her like that, was inexcusable. *I'm only crying from the pain*, I told myself. *From the pain in my wrist. Not from anything else.* This moment would define my memory of that night, and of the many nights like it, for a decade. In it I saw myself as unbreakable, as tender as stone. At first I merely believed this, until one day it became the truth. Then I was able to tell myself, without lying, that it didn't affect me, that he didn't affect me, because nothing affected me. I didn't understand how morbidly right I was. How I had hollowed myself out. For all my obsessing over the consequences of that night, I had misunderstood the vital truth: that it was not affecting me, that *was* its effect."(Westover 114). My own personal experience battling this disease is not within myself, but my best friend in highschool. She would have an outburst almost everyday, every time resulting in me getting the aftermath. This was so difficult for me to deal with. No matter what issue she had to face I would face it with her. She was my absolute best friend, I couldn't imagine my life without her. Until I realized there was no relationship anymore. I was exerting all my energy and time to make sure she was okay, and that we were still friends. It might sound pathetic but it's true, I really put her before myself. I ended our friendship almost six month ago now, and I couldn't be happier with what my lifes become. Before I ended it, I thought to myself I love this girl so much but I can't continue to deal with this disease. My best friend's situation was the most stressful I've ever dealt with, because of this mental illness I am no longer close with the girl I once loved nor will I ever be again. Our relationship is very similar to that of Shawn and Tara. We both had to be away from each other for us to be truly happy.

Anxiety is the most common form of mental illness, My mother and I both suffer from anxiety. It's great knowing I have someone there to support me that's experiencing the same thing, but at the same time, it is hard to deal with on a daily basis. Tara

experiences anxiety multiple times throughout *Educated*. The first time coming at BYU, when she raised her hand asking what the holocaust was. She was immediately humiliated not only by her teacher but the whole class. This gave Tara anxiety about ever raising her hand again in class. She talks about this incident in the following quote, “I suppose my interest came from the sense of groundlessness I’d felt since learning about the Holocaust and the civil rights movement—since realizing that what a person knows about the past is limited, and will always be limited, to what they are told by others”(Westover 167). Another prime example of anxiety is when Tara is threatened by her own brother Shawn. He calls her repeatedly, saying how he’s gonna kill her, or his assassin is going to. Tara begins to sleep less at night due to the effects of anxiety. My mother suffers from severe anxiety, when I was younger she became reliant on the medications prescribed to her. This made me never want to get the right treatment for my own mental health struggles. It made me think I would develop the same issues as my mom. Eventually, my mom was unprescribed her medication switching to something less addictive. Following this I began talking to a professional about my own issues really overall improving my mental health. This disease has affected me and the ones I love so much. It has taught me many lessons on life, and how to deal with interior issues within myself just as Tara did.

Mental health as discussed in *Educated* hits close to home. My own story and that of so many other people around the world is why we should discuss the issue of mental health. Throughout my essay I've discussed the mental illnesses that have affected both Tara and I throughout our lives. Family is a huge part of a person's mental health. After reading this I hope you have more insight into my way of thinking, and what I've been through. Sharing my own story is a difficult journey of it's own. I decided

it's time to finally shine light on the real pandemic affecting our world. Just as Tara has done for us in the excellent memoir *Educated*.

Families Aren't for Everyone
Teaghen Schraufek-Forshee

Families aren't always the best for everyone, or even aren't always forever. Not everyone is blessed with the most perfect and supportive family. There are people who have very terrible and toxic relationships with their family where are just completely torn down by the people who are supposed to love and support them. In *Educated*, Tara Westover's family has always been hard on her and not always the most supportive with her decisions or anything she does. Tara Westover is from a very strict family who live in Buck's Peak. Tara's family is very different. They don't go to school and work with her father, her family doesn't believe in medicine and hospitals, and believe in herbs and the healing of God. Tara's father preaches to her family about everything, her mother is quiet and goes with whatever Tara's father says, her brother Shawn is very aggressive with her, and her sister Audrey doesn't talk to her because her mother says she's chose fear and the devil. After Tara decided to go to school, against her families' wishes, everything with her family just started to fall apart. In *Educated*, Tara Westover's strict family is extremely toxic to her, and since family isn't the best thing for Tara, she's better off leaving them behind.

The Westover was very strict and sheltered Tara from everything, which made college very difficult for her. In *Educated*, Tara Westover says, "what a person knows about the past is limited, and will always be limited, to what they are told by others" (Westover 238). According to "An Insider's View of the Life of a First-Generation Scholar", "Such students are often not only less academically prepared than their fellows

but also share little of cultural capital – the experience of literature and arts, the social network, the confidence in institutional navigation – that their college-family peers have”(Herb Childress 1). I chose this quote from “An Insider’s View of the Life of a First-Generation Scholar” because Tara lacks cultural capital. Tara’s parents have sheltered her from the outside world most of her childhood. Her father preached to her and told her about school was bad. In chapter 17, during Tara’s art history class, they were discussing the Holocaust. Tara wasn’t familiar with the Holocaust, so she asked her teacher what it was. Tara’s class thought she was joking about a very serious topic. Due to Tara’s parents sheltering her, this caused her to lose her only friend she had in the class. Tara’s parents’ decision to “protect her from the world”, made college very hard for her because she wasn’t familiar with most of the topics.

The Westover family doesn’t always treat her the best, but it’s her family and she can’t seem to just let them go. Examples and evidence from *Educated* and possibly outside sources. In *Educated*, Tara says, “It’s strange how you give the people you love so much power over you” (p. 199). According to “Attachment Theory and Post Cult Recovery”, “Disorganized attachment has both emotional and cognitive effect” (Stein, Russell 16). I chose the quote from “Attachment Theory and Post Cult Recovery” because there are signs that Tara suffers from this. All she knows and has grown up with is Buck’s Peak. She’s been with her family her whole life. She’s so used to how that life has been, it’s not just something she can completely drop and forget so easy. She attended college and lives there most of the week, but she still visits and lives by the same rules as if she was still home. Her family has a strong hold on her. It’s a part of her and she’s always going to carry that with her. How Tara’s family raised her and where she came from is always going to show and be a part of her life wherever she is.

The best thing Tara Westover can do for herself is let her family go and move onto her better, healthier life. In *Educated*, Tara says, “My mother begged me to find another way. My father said nothing” (Westover 313). According to “Attachment Theory and Post Cult Recovery”, “I realized that, even though I disconnected myself from this group, I had never had a conversation with anyone else who had chosen to leave” (Stein, Russell 20). I chose this quote from “Attachment Theory and Post Cult Recovery” because at the end of *Educated*, Tara chose to take Drew’s advice and let her family go. Her family was the worst thing for her. They made her think everything she experienced was a lie or her fault. She was better off moving away and not having them in her life.

Educated’s Tara Westover comes from a very strict family who doesn’t treat her the best, letting go of her family and choosing her own path is the best thing for her. Tara’s family has had a huge impact on her. She has been around her family most of her life and grew up believing everything her father preached to her. The Westover family sheltered her and put in her head the outside world is bad. Once she went the college, she had a hard time because this was a whole new environment and different views. She discovered everything her father said wasn’t true. Tara suffered from a lot of problems because of her family. She finally decided to let them go when her boyfriend said it’d be the best thing for her. After, no believed her and accused her of lying and being possessed by the devil. Families are supposed to love and support you. If your family is making you feel bad about bettering yourself, and choosing a better life, tearing you down, being abusive, and just not being proud and supporting you, then let them go. They are causing you more problems than you think and are better off without them. You need to surround yourself by people who are going to push you to do better and

support you through every step of your life. You do not need any negativity in your life that's holding you back. "It's okay to cut toxic family members out of your life. Blood ain't thicker than piece of mind."

Restraints
Alloura Stevens

Cults have been around since the beginning of time; however, the one introduced in the book *Educated* by Tara Westover is strange but also fascinating. Tara explains her personal life experiences of a family who made themselves outcasts to protect themselves from the government and the ever-changing world around them. The isolated life over the years gave her father complete control of them and having so much control made him feel powerful and paranoid. The definition of a cult is “tight control of personal relationships, separation from the outside world and lack of autonomy in decision making” (Stein & Russell 18) This is exactly what Tara’s father does not only to her but the rest of her family. Tara struggles to escape the isolated cult her father made when she was a child. She feels compelled to be loyal to her father and family, so when out on her own she struggles to make her own choices and struggles with having other personal relationships.

Tara has always felt her restraints being tugged at every time she tried to make her own choices. Her father, Gene, wanted 100% control over what Tara wanted to do in her life. We first see these ideas really take hold of Tara when tries to leave her father's junkyard to work in town. We also see it when Tyler, who is Tara’s brother, tries to leave for college. “dad’s resolve turned to denial; he acted as if the argument were over and he had won. He stopped talking about Tyler leaving and even refused to hire a hand to replace him” (Westover 48) During this time we see Tara’s father have a harmful attachment to his children. He refuses to let them make their own life decisions. “Like the infant, cult members develop a disorganized, potentially harmful attachment

behavior” (Stein & Russell 20) This harmful attachment carries over to when Tara tries to make her own decision about going to college. Her father has such a tight hold on what she can do, she questions if she will even be good enough to go to college. Then when she realizes she has passed the ACT; her father talks her out of it. So, overall we see Tara struggling with what she wants to do with her life because her father holds her back.

Cult leaders keep their followers from having much contact with the outside world. In *Educated* we see how Gene, Tara’s father, keeps them highly isolated by not allowing his children to go to school, hospitals, and just being a part of the community. Tara writes, “Dad said I was becoming “uppity”. He didn’t like that I rushed home from the junkyard the moment the work was finished, or that I removed every trace of grease before going out with Charles.” (Westover 175) It was here that we see Tara starting to break away from her family, her father. Stein and Russell communicate, “If the client has broken away from the cult as a young adult, this may happen as part of a necessary teenage/adult rebellion” (21) Tara’s father did not like that she was trying to become more active in the community which he has labeled as bad because it is the outside world. He did not build it, so he does not trust it. He views her actions as a stage of rebellion. He does not want Tara to think she can do whatever she wants.

Tara has a fierce loyalty to her father which makes having outside personal relationships hard. Westover writes, “I broke up with Nick-callously, I’m ashamed to say. I never told him of my life before, never sketched for him the world that had invited and obliterated the one he and I shared” (227) Tara has always struggled with relationships because the place has a hold on her that she fears she’ll never break. She ultimately breaks up with Nick when she realizes that she is afraid to share her

background and who her family really is. “Any attachment other than to the leader – is frowned upon: such attachments interfered with primary allegiance to the leader or group” (Stein & Russell 18) We learn very early on that Gene does not approve of his daughters other personal relationships. This idea ties into the outside world issue because these relations are the key to Tara breaking free of the chains, he has on her.

The cult Tara Westover grew up in was very intense and hard to handle. Her and her family were survivalists in the Idaho mountains. She had no one to help intervene when things in her home got dangerous with abuse. Eventually Tara escaped to college, but she still had not broken ties for it would be several years later that she would escape the chains that truly held her down. Once at college she began to realize what had really happened to her in her childhood/teen years. Once this revelation started Tara began to fight back and tried to receive justice for herself.

Once Tara starts this revolution her father becomes convinced that Satan has taken over Tara. This is where a sacrifice is made. She loved her family, but she had to lose her father’s reality for hers to come to light. Tara Westover says, “you can love someone and still choose to say goodbye to them. You can miss a person every day, and still be glad they are no longer in your life.”

The Devil Inside

Randall Wood

I thought I had found love, but what I had found was a mentally ill monster. I find it extremely bizarre how we allow ourselves to be continually put through physical and emotional abuse by the ones we love. It becomes alarming how much we allow to happen. For what? Why is it we allow such treatment and abuse from people we love? How is it the ones who love us hurt us the most? How much is too much? These are all questions I have been faced to answer sadly, as well as questions we ask ourselves as we read the book *Educated* by Tara Westover. In Westover's book we are introduced to Tara and her abusive and manipulative family. Westover recounts tales of abuse from her family especially from her father and brother Shawn. I can not relate so much on a family level as I can on a past intimate relationship. Reading *Educated* we learn how Shawn and Tara went from close and loving siblings to Shawn physically abusing Tara to show power and dominance. Tara accepts the abuse for years and plays it off to outsiders looking in as her and her brothers aggressively playful love. But as we read, we learn that Tara has repeatedly lied to herself and others to "save face." She lies to herself to make herself believe that the abuse is out of love. While I relate to the stories Westover recounts in *Educated*, I could not contrast and differ more at the same time. Even though our accounts of abuse are different so much is the same. Tara does a fantastic job at conveying her experience with abuse and mental illness in *Educated*. This is what I experienced and went through.

We learn in Westover's *Educated* that Tara has been a victim of abuse caused by mental illness early on, or so we begin to feel this anyway. Reading deeper into the book

we learn that Tara too begins to realize that mental illness is a key factor in much of the abuse she receives. Her brother Shawn was not always abusive in earlier years of her life. In fact, they were so close in earlier years Shawn would play and gave her the nickname of “Siddle Lister” when they embark on a trip covering their brothers trucking business. Soon after returning a girl named Sadie began to develop a crush on Shawn. Shawn begins to show dominance and treat this girl poorly. And in turn this is when he begins to be abusive and horrible toward Tara. It was a similar situation with Tara’s father. When she was young and willing to work in the family junkyard her father loved her and had no issues. But as she grew older and questioned the world and furthered her education, he began to treat her badly.

While it is not a sibling relationship, the first year of my last relationship was too fun and playful. My ex, whom I will for privacy call Jacob, and I were playful and would call the other “lovebug” or “lover” and everything was perfect. Jacob was sweet and treated me like a King. One day after I began my new job Jacob came into see me at work and noticed how nice and friendly my boss was toward me. This is when the subtle mental abuse would start. Daily I would be criticized on the way I dressed, even in my work uniform for Waffle House, and how I would carry myself in general. It started with Jacob saying things like, “wearing your clothes like that just make you look easy,” or “walking that way shows you only want guys staring at your ass.” He was implying that I was showing off or trying to get others attention when I only wanted his. This turned into more aggressive nights. We would go out to the bar and Jacob would make sure to keep me drinking and taking whatever drugs he had to offer me. He used my addiction against me to ensure I would be submissive and “behave.” Jacob would get into physical

altercations at the bar to scare me into doing what he said. I remember one day sitting at the bar having a nice conversation with a sweet older gentleman named Nick. This man was in his late sixties and just wanted to talk to someone. Jacob, dancing with whomever while I talked to this man, notices this gentleman speaking to me and without warning comes and grabs me by the back of the neck and says, “what the fuck are you thinking?” Forces my face down onto the bar with his left hand and hits that sweet old man with his right. I can not forget this moment because this is when the man I thought I loved became an extremely different person. I managed to get up from my bar stool and ran out of the bar. He quickly grabbed me up by my arm and forced me to the car and threw me into the passenger seat. We left in silence and I was terrified. Being so doped up on a mixture of drugs I black out on the ride home and the next day he comes up with some bull shit story about how the man was harassing me. He did not realize I remembered the entire altercation and that I was a willing participant in the conversation with the innocent man. But as Westover does time and time again with her brother Shawn, I lie to myself and start to believe that Jacob was truly helping me and that maybe I was indeed confused. He makes it a point that whole day to treat me like a King and I thought to myself, maybe this was just him protecting me like he said. This exact scenario played out at least a dozen times all at different bars and with different people. Jacob kept me so messed up on drugs that I honestly thought I was going insane.

The last few months of our relationship were the worst. It started when I was picked up and learned that Jacob had been getting all my texts from our phone company on a paper print out each month. He began assuming that my dealer and I were being

intimate because of some of the messages. Looking back yes I probably did flirt due to the lack of interest in the new Jacob that had recently began to be present in my life, but when he dropped the stack of messages on my lap before I could say a word he knocked me out. When I awoke, we were driving, and Jacob was crying holding my hand. I asked why he hit me, and he began saying he was sorry, and it would never happen again he just did not want me to leave him for another man. He handed me an ounce of marijuana and an ounce of meth and promised he would never do anything like that ever again. Being the addict, I was I rationalized this in my head thinking he would not of spent that kind of money if he were not sorry. Boy was I wrong. He did this to again manipulate me by using my addiction against me which I know now was another form of abuse.

The situation that caused me to wake up and realize what he was doing to me is something I will never forget. We were on a Christmas vacation to Colorado with his family. Before leaving Jacob had secured plenty of drugs to keep me happy, or so he thought. Keep in mind ever since he had begun to get physical with me, I would not sleep with him. I would constantly play sick or act tired and try to “fall asleep” before he would come to bed. In the snowy mountains we kicked off the beginning of the vacation great. We spent the first few days skiing in the fluffy freshly fallen snow during the day and relaxing by the fire as a family by night. It was almost perfect. After an amazing day of skiing I wanted to be in bed early because Jacob had been heavily flirting all day. I was in bed and soon asleep when I was awoken by Jacob’s hands in my underwear. I woke up and explained that was not okay because I was asleep and not consenting. Jacob quickly apologized and stated that he was not thinking, and it would not happen

again. I of course told myself because we are a couple, he thought it was okay and I put the abuse on the back burner as I had countless times. The next day he had my drug cocktail ready to go and we left to ski for the day. After hours on the slopes we go up the lift for one last run down the mountain. As we go to ski off the lift, I twinge my knee a little and am in a little pain. After carefully skiing down the slope we finally make it to the car. I tell Jacob what happened and without thinking he quickly offered me two morphine pills. Being an addict, I take them without question. Back at the condo I am still in a little pain, so Jacob offers me drink after drink to “help the pills” as he called it. After several drinks I am to a point where I need to be carried to bed where I blackout. I awaken on my stomach, faced forced into a pillow, and in agonizing pain. I am so doped up on opiates and alcohol it takes several minutes to realize that Jacob is raping me. I lay there helpless from the drugs and alcohol that are practically leaving me paralyzed. I remove myself mentally from the situation and relive my first Cheerleading Competition over and over. I take in all the feelings of excitement, happiness, and fear that day brought, and I keep it on replay. Honestly, I cannot even tell you how long it went on for. I probably replayed the routine 20 or 30 times in my mind each time the routine the same 3 minutes over and over. Then it was over. After he was finished, I waited until it sounded as if he had fallen asleep and I went to the shower. I scrubbed and scrubbed my body feeling forever dirty from what he had just done to me. After I showered, I cried myself to sleep on the couch in that old condo watching the fire crackle and pop. I awoke the next day on Christmas in a foggy haze. Jacob criticized me for moving to the couch and acted as if nothing had happened. He moved in to kiss me good morning and I backed away and said, “last night?” Jacob looked at me with his smug smirk and said, “what are you talking about?” I looked back confused and he said, “you were tossing and

turning I think it was from the meds I gave you.” I sat there knowing exactly what had happened knowing he was full of shit. But I sat there with him all day thinking maybe it was all a dream. My conscious mind was trying to lie to myself, but my subconscious mind kept playing small snippets of what I had checked out of the night before. I could not take anymore. I sat quiet for the next day before leaving for Kansas City.

After returning home I began to relive the moment when I awoke that night. I would see it and go blank. Then I began to relive when he knocked me out, as well as the countless people he assaulted over me. I began to realize that what was being done to me was not right. Later in Westover’s *Educated* she develops a backbone and begins to stand up to her father and brother Shawn. On page 211 of Westover’s *Educated* we see how she stands up and yells at her father for the first time. Tara says, “I was so suffocated by rage, my words didn’t come out as words, but as choking, sputtering sobs. Why are you like this? Why did you terrify us like that?” (Westover 211). As it did with Tara it took me a long time before I could stand up and say something. Sure, my relationship was just under two years and Tara’s was a big chunk of her life, but I relate still so much to her standing up to her dad. I ignored Jacob for several days while figuring out what to do. But the day he showed up to my house unannounced was the day I came unglued. He asked, “where have you been?” I simply replied, “you sick son of a bitch, you raped me and unless you want me to call the law, I suggest you get the fuck off my property.” He attempted to beg for forgiveness, and I laughed. “I said you need to leave,” I told him. He got this look of fright in his eyes and left. I have not seen nor spoken to Jacob since that day.

Why do we allow for the ones we love to abuse and treat us poorly? Maybe its because we want to hold on to the person we fell in love with and believe the monster they become is not real. Maybe it is a form of mental illness in ourselves that believe they are what we deserve. I can not tell you for sure. What I can tell you is that nobody who truly loves you would do anything to hurt you or put you in danger. That is my experience anyway when it comes to a relationship. As for family as Tara Westover experienced in *Educated*, I can not say for sure. Because the mental illness and abuse from it came from people who no doubt loved her as it was her father and brother. Not some mentally ill control freak who drugged and manipulated someone into being their mental slave. So, I cannot speak on the family aspect. But if you are in a relationship and you love somebody you would not treat someone whom you truly loved as Jacob treated me. So again, why do we allow it to happen? I truly do not know.

Education and Literacy



Fighting Demons
Megan Dahlhauser

When we think of education, most of the time we think of school. We think of standardized tests, classrooms, a teacher with a ruler in one hand and a shiny red apple in the other. I know I can still smell the dust from the old chalkboards just as easily as I remember the loud click the projector makes when the lights turn off and the wall becomes a blurry screen. When we really think about it though, when we break down what education means to us, it is no longer about the schools. It becomes more to us than just learning basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. Education gives us hope. We hope that the piece of paper to signify our degree and all our hard work, will bring us to a better career and a better future. I know that is the case for many, such as Tara Westover, author of *Educated*, and myself. That's not all, education gives us the ability to communicate and understand in ways we would struggle to otherwise without the knowledge and words, confessed by Gloria Naylor, author of *The Love of Books*, and myself. Education brings not only hope, not only understanding, but freedom as described myself.

I don't have very many happy memories from my childhood, but one of the happiest memories I have as a child is a simple memory most of us probably share. I can't remember the house we lived in at the time, the room that we were in, or how old I was. All I remember is being submerged in blankets and pillows, my mother's warm body beside me. She would have a book in her hand, not a child's book with pictures, a novel that she herself was interested in reading, that she would read to me. I would lay there at night, eyes closed, picturing the scenes as best as my young mind could, though

some of the time I didn't have a clue what she was describing. My active imagination filled in the blanks, to the point it was hard at times to distinguish whether I had envisioned what she was saying or simply fallen asleep and dreamed a dream of my own. Regardless, I enjoyed the peaceful moments we shared, a rare treasure that all too soon ceased to exist. I don't remember when those moments stopped or why, only that they did and were replaced with more unpleasant things. The warmth that was there faded, my mother was no longer interested in sharing stories with me, in fact it seemed she wasn't interested in anything to do with me at all. I was there, but only to do things no one wanted to do. I did all the cooking though she'd never say I was a good cook. I did all the cleaning even though she'd call me a slob. I nursed her back to health whenever she was sick but if I fell ill or got hurt, it was my fault for not feeling better. I worked and got a job to help pay the bills while she was a 'stay-at-home-mom'.

I hated reading for a while, perhaps because it reminded me of my mother. She would dote on my brother for his love of books, just one more thing she liked more about him than me. I had that impression daily, so I was sort of used to it, but it still left a bitter taste in my mouth. My brother wasn't treated the same as me. He wasn't forced to cook and clean after school, he wasn't forced to get a job and pay for bills, nor did he ever suffer from the slew of insults that rained down on me from my own mother's mouth like a busted pipe. I was five the first time I remember her muttering the word 'whore' and 'bitch' could have been my middle name. It wasn't common for me to have any friends, because I wasn't allowed to have friends over or stay the night, nor could I play after school because I had to go home and do chores. The few exceptions there were to those rules, made me realize how unusual my circumstances were. More than once, the friends I would make called '*Cinderella*'. I knew of the story, as most people do, but

from word of mouth alone. I knew the main character was a woman, there was a mean old step mother, and then a handsome prince that saves the woman from the step mother. I recall being at a library, curiously pulling the blue book off the shelf to read about the beautiful girl who was apparently like me. I knew how the story ended, but I had never read it before and even in that moment, after the first few pages, I slid the book back into its slot. I don't remember exactly what it was that made me do it, just that I didn't like what I was reading. I hated reading in general and that story rubbed me the wrong way, maybe it was too similar.. Eventually I fell behind the other students. When I was in middle school, my reading comprehension was behind so my parents decided to buy me a set of books based on the adventures of fictional cats. They forced me to read it and I am glad they did. As I read those pages, it was like I was back in the pile of warm pillows and blankets. It was my first taste of escape-ism and it tasted of sweet freedom. In one summer I had gone from being far behind to well ahead the rest of my grade.

The more I read, the more I loved reading. Escape between the pages had become my safe place, my home yet books alone did not spark my journey to education. They simply allowed me the sanity to pursue it. Even though I would escape to fictional worlds, the real world remained unpleasant. It was easier to bare, to forget about, but it was always there. I was distracted from life, so the house got messier without me cleaning it. Hoarders, we would have called us. Not the 'good kind' that had a bunch of cool knick knacks piled to the ceiling, but that bad kind with mountains of trash, maggots in the kitchen, and animal feces on the floor. I never once thought the way we lived was normal, yet for some reason my brain told me it was acceptable. We would be evicted, eventually, not that it mattered we never stayed in one place too long. The bad

checks and fraud could catch up with us if we did, not only that, but there had been a couple of times when I was younger that I had tried to talk to someone, a school counselor about things at home that were bothering me. I had apparently said too much, I remember we moved shortly after. I remember being yelled at by my mother for it, that what happens in our family should stay in our family. Even my father was upset with me at those times. Clearly, I had done something horribly wrong. I didn't know better. I was just a kid and at the time what they told me could have been from the mouth of Babe, straight from the *Bible* itself-- not that we were religious.

As I mentioned before, education gives us hope. I brought up Tara Westover and her work *Educated*, because we share very similar stories even though they are very different. Tara writes her story, which takes place in a secluded mountain range in Idaho, where her Mormon family lives off the radar. Her father, who she later confesses most likely suffered from mental illness, is abusive to her entire family. They are deprived of medical aid, education, and social interaction. Her older brother leaves, creating tension in the family which escalates when Tara decides to follow suit some years later. Her story is one where she struggles discovering the rest of the world and finding a new place to belong in it. "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.377). When Tara Westover first started her journey, she hadn't the slightest clue what she was doing. She had no one to guide her, had no support from her family. She lacked knowledge on history, current events, and basic social decorum. She was flying blind, not knowing what she was flying towards. Answers, hope. Tara Westover was abused and neglected physically, mentally, and

spiritually by her family. We see the perversion of their faith and neglect immediately in Chapter One as her father argues with their Grandmother about public schools and honey butter. We see it again in Chapter Twelve when her brother shoves her face first into a toilet bowl.

Tara Westover begins to journal as a way to help work through her thoughts, as does Gloria Naylor, who I mentioned earlier. In *Naylor's The Love Of Books*, she says "...I made a vital connection between inarticulate feeling and the written word. Whatever went into those original pages are not eternal keepsakes, they are not classic thoughts, but they were my feelings" (Naylor 200) Gloria seems to talk briefly about depression, as she mentions even at the age of twelve, she had demons and those demons were very real. In the briefest of glimmers she mentions teen suicides and that her mother in giving her the diary had saved her life by doing so because, "The idea that I had to step forth and give voice to something was a nightmare" (Naylor 200). She had no outlet, no way to communicate her feelings and no help in understanding them. She quoted a poem called "*The Unclaimed*," by Nikky Finney that describes how every story an author writes, there are thousands of others with the same story who couldn't share it with the world.

I read these stories "*The Love of Books*" and *Educated*, and I think about myself. I think about how reading was an escape for me and what it is I was escaping from. I think about the struggles my family endured and the millions of ways to avoid that struggle as I continue through life. It was only natural I turned to school for it, when we don't know what we are looking for I think we are naturally drawn to a place that is supposed to have all the answers. I saw that a lot with Tara Westover when she decided to go to school. She describes most events like she saw them on T.V. and not as if they

affected her. Honestly, that is something I relate to. There are a lot of times we do things because we feel like we have to, even if we don't understand why we want to. School, a place of all this knowledge, gives the illusion that it alone can make things better. Though as Tara and myself have learned, it is a lot of hard work to actually make things better. Gloria was lucky, she admitted, that her mother was insightful enough to give her a diary, giving her what she was looking for even though she herself didn't know that was exactly what she needed. For all three of us, our relationship with written words has been more than just words. It has been a journey through the difficult times in our lives. We turned to books to help hide us from our demons then fight them when we come face to face. We turned to books to give us knowledge and fill the missing pieces of things we never knew we never knew. All three of us have demons. We all had/have something we run from and something, as vague of an idea as it might be, we run towards and our single biggest tool in both are words. Written words that help us explain what we think and feel. Words that help us understand the parts of the world that were hidden from us, so that we can mold a better place in this world for ourselves. For us, literacy has been key in us being able to understand, to be understood, and to hope.

Why Not Me?

Carlo Gamino

My educational journey is unique. When I was in the 9th grade, I was told in a parent/teacher conference that I would turn out okay because I was a “respectful and charismatic young man.” While my behavior in class was not a concern to my teachers, my ability to focus and comprehend things were. These bad traits of mine hurt my grades tremendously, and with no solutions from my teachers, I did everything in my will just maintain a GPA that would keep me eligible for sports. This lethargic approach eventually landed me with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). And I felt the school let me down by placing me in tiny classrooms, isolated from all my friends — following a curriculum that was at a slower pace than my peers with no end goal. No foundations, no system, or help for me to improve just small classes. These moments plagued my mind with the idea that education meant one thing for children of white-collar parents and another for working-class families like mine. What I failed to realize then, was that education is the only way to bridge the gap between class warfare. And this semester, studying *Educated* and works like “How I Learned to Read and Write” forced me to look inward, and provided me guidance on grit, perseverance, and work-ethic. In reading the work of Westover and Douglass, my view of what education is has been altered. Education isn’t some abstract theory: It’s a combination of determination, curiosity, with plenty of setbacks. For Douglass, it provided literal freedom from slavery. For Westover it provided freedom from generations of abuse in rural Idaho, and for me, although my journey is not complete, education is providing me an opportunity to show other young people in my position that it is an attainable goal to be the first in your

family to attend school. That all the sacrifices your parents made are worth it. And we have an obligation to ourselves to constantly get better. Within the next few pages, I'll compare and contrast my educational journey to Westover's and Douglass's and hopefully provide remedies for future roadblocks I'll encounter.

In reading, "How I learned to Read and Write" Douglass seeks out guidance from peers that know how to read, "The plan which I adopted, and the one by which I was most successful, was that of making friends of all the little white boys whom I met in the street. As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers." (Douglass 190).

Douglass's approach is one I have avoided during my educational journey. Because of the isolation I faced being in small classrooms, and the constant feeling of being judged by my peers because of my poor grades — I avoided speaking with my friends about school as much as I could. Fearing that if any subject was brought up, I would be viewed as inferior to them. My approach was a polar opposite to Douglass's. Thinking about it now, there were plenty of talented friends of mine that would have been more than willing to help without any judgement. Yet my insecurities prevailed again. Moving forward in my educational journey, I must emulate Douglass's willingness to be humble and learn from others. It's clear that Douglass credits seeking guidance from his peers as a benefit to his growth in Education. And although he would later say that at times he felt learning was a curse rather than a blessing, I believe Douglass learned to appreciate the process that goes along with learning, and the difficulties that he encountered benefited his work-ethic that helped gain him his freedom

In *Educated*, Tara Westover defined her view on what being educated is by saying, "You could call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it education." (Westover 329). Tara was also talking about how

she viewed herself during that time and her identity. For much of her life, how she viewed herself was influenced by others in her life. Like Tara, when I was told I'd have an IEP, I took it negatively and immediately thought that I was less than others. What I should have done was take advantage of the slower pace courses — understanding that the end result of conquering the subject was all that mattered, not the humiliation that I felt every day walking to class. Westover's interpretation on education being an evolving process is true, both personally and in the classroom. Westover had to distance herself from her family that brought so much chaos to her life, and they often ridiculed her for the decision she made to leave for college. Though painful, straying away from her family eventually led her to put aside all of the negative things that were happening back home, and although she was still troubled by her past — she was eventually able to get her PhD. Similarly to Westover, I most adopt her focus on academics and blocking out problems that are going back home. I've written previously that I left my working with my father in Seattle to completely focus on my education and Although the circumstances from Westover and I to pursue an education were different, the anxiety of failure loomed over the both of us. Tara had a burden of assimilating to societal-norms while hiding the fact that she has never stepped foot in a classroom. My burden has been confidence, and feeling that I am behind because I was never taught how to properly study or take notes. Or how to comprehend passages in textbooks. While I continue to work on conquering all of these struggles, I must remind myself that Westover had it so much worse, and battled through the same anxieties when a text book was in front of her. Constantly reminding myself of Tara's struggles may help to propel me to figure out a system where I can achieve. And more importantly, to put me in a position to one day give guidance to others facing the same issues I had.

In this paper, I have discussed education and hurdles that it presents, specifically to people that grew up in a household where education was hidden from them, or they were homeschooled and much of the truth was hidden for them. In my case, we spoke about the doubts I have had about myself and presented a few solutions to combat those thoughts. My final thoughts on the importance of getting educated are influenced by Tara Westover and Frederick Douglass's desire to make their difficult stories heard to motivate others. Westover's account of her life in rural Idaho was unflinchingly honest, and exposed a sad reality that life in isolation can be difficult and violence can be hidden. And her eventually getting a PhD only ten years from the first time she set foot in a classroom — provided a victory for everyone that suffered from not having a formal education and who is worried to begin their own educational journey. Douglass's account of being exposed to a hint of education and eventually becoming one of the more accomplished writers in American history, set an example to black citizens in that era, that becoming literate was not only possible, but you could end up motivating readers for generations to come. There were people that doubted Westover would ever adapt. There were those that doubted a slave could ever become literate. There are acquaintances of mine that criticize me for pursuing an education when I could have taken over my father's shop eventually. The most important thing Westover, Douglass, and I have is faith in ourselves — I often wonder if they asked themselves the rhetorical question I repeat in my head when I have doubt — “Why Not Me?”

Literacy Autobiography

Blake Goforth

There is no one true term to describe what education is. Everyone has different experiences in life and what we go through shapes our definition of education. For me, education is just a tool on my belt to use later in life and to shape me into the person I want to be. I get this education from my adventures in life, the stories I hear or read, and from lessons I've already learned. For Tara Westover at the end of her book *Educated* when she becomes her own person and not her family's puppet she says, "You could call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call it an education" (Westover 329). So her definition of education is her past shaping who she will be in the future and the choices she chooses to make which is the only way our definitions of education interact with each other. Whereas Sherman Alexie in his essay "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me" says for him education is a door and "The door holds. I am smart. I am arrogant. I am lucky. I am trying to save our lives." (Alexie 187). Sherman Alexie sees education as a way for him to save the lives of himself and the other Indian kids that he teaches who become educated. Sherman Alexie and I believe that education is like a tool belt which is what I treat my education as.

My definition of education comes from my family and the books that I've read. Within my life I have experienced three examples of how a person can live and achieve the life that I want. One of the lives is My dad's; he lives in poverty only working under the table cash jobs to support his family. It is like this because he is a convicted felon whose highest form of education is high school. My Grandparents and my mom live ok

lives. They have enough money so they don't live paycheck to paycheck but they don't have a lot of money to just buy whatever they want when they want it. For this life, my mom earned a college degree and uses it only in her job. My grandparents have only a high school diploma but they have taught themselves a trade. They became construction workers and painters so they could make a living. Then finally there's the life that I want which is my uncle's life. He used every little bit of education he had to do his current job and to own his own business to make money. That's why in everything I do in life from games, school, and work I use every last thing I am taught that way I can keep improving myself and keep improving my skills. Like when I play cards I use deductive reasoning and my gut to make choices on what to and not to do. This is good because I trained my reasoning skills. I also learn to use that to make a gut decision choice. This all happened because of something my grandmother told me once when I was little. She said, "People learn a lot in life. It's what they do with the knowledge they have that will matters". This changed my thought on what learning meant to me. After she told me that I took every opportunity to learn new things. It's just like how Tara started to live her life when she left Bucks Peak. Once she went to college she started to change whether she wanted to change or not. We find this out when Tara reads the message that her sister Audry sends her that reads " That I had betrayed her because I'd Given myself over to fear the realm of Satan, rather than walking in faith with God. I was dangerous, she said, because I was controlled by that fear, and by the Father of Fear, Lucifer" (Westover 293). Now, this isn't exactly the explanation of how she changed but this was caused by it. This came about because Tara changed from the girl who did whatever she was told. She now thinks for herself and not just goes by what her dad says. We know this is happening because Tara tells a lady on the phone " there's a

problem,” “ The check is for four thousand dollars, but I only need fourteen hundred” (Westover 205). In this, she is referring to money the government sent her which she originally didn’t want because of her father saying it was evil; however she learned that it’s not and that she learned it was very helpful to her. This is a prime example of Tara’s and my definition of education. This is because she learned a new idea and a better understanding of how the world works which can be a tool on her tool belt to use later. Not only that, it was the start of the transformation she sought to be the new her.

I learn not just through my life, but also through the books I read. Now, granted, I prefer comic books and my favorites are the ones that have a guy who was bullied and then gained immense strength to do good in life or to pay the people back for the way they treated the main character or the week. It’s one of the reasons I want to be strong so I can stop it from happening to myself and the people I care about. So books helped me learn how I want to be and what a good person can be. I’ve been doing this since I was a little kid. From the Encyclopedia Brown books that I used to read then to my Sherlock Holmes books and finally onto all the comic books that I read. The coolest part is that even though the genres vary from romance to fighting it all helps me gain this understanding. There is something one of the teachers say in my comic that resonates with me and that is, “ I always believed that there are no junk spirits, only junk people” (Wei Chapter 3 Page 23). What he means by this is that there are no junk abilities or history, only people who abuse or treat others unfairly for their abilities or history. This is something that I try to live by and something I incorporate into my daily life. This is almost how Sherman Alexie learns everything from books and that sticks with him for the rest of his life. We find out that it was books that made the most impact on him when he tells us that “I can remember picking up my father’s books before I could read.

The words themselves were mostly foreign, but I still remember the exact moment when I first understood, with sudden clarity, the purpose of a paragraph. I didn't have the vocabulary to say Paragraph, But I realized a paragraph was a fence that held words" (Alexie 186). This is why books are so important because even though he didn't know the word paragraph or how to read he was still learning things from books. That's why I read because what you experience in life is not enough. You also need the written word. It doesn't even have to be written; it is just the stories they tell that people learn from. Two quotes represent this the best one of which is "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (George Santayana). The other quote is "A picture is worth a thousand words" (Fred R. Barnard). Both of these quotes are very true when talking about the stories that we learn from. If we didn't hear the stories from our elders then we would take the risk of making the same mistakes as they do and a picture can tell us a whole story if it is in the right hands a person can learn a lot from it. One example for me about repeating the past would involve something my mom told me, "Our lives may have turned out differently if I had stayed in school to be an accountant. Instead, I listened to your father and dropped out of college for him, and then he went and cheated on me. Promise me you won't forsake your future just for another person". This story and the promise I made my mom was set that I wouldn't follow her mistakes when I told her "Don't worry mom I'm not as dumb as you are to do that. No matter how much I love someone I'll put my future ahead of everything else". Now I'm glad she told me this story because now I see how bad life can be when someone quits the thing they are good at. So I will never repeat her mistakes.

Another way I learn is to use my past skills to further develop new ones. For example, the education I learn gives me something else I can use in life that can in turn

enhance another skill I have or give me a whole brand new tool I can use. This happened to me a few times, one time was when I was learning how to give public speeches in Mrs. MacNamara's public speaking class in the 11th grade. Now, this was in a classroom however I never thought I'd use this outside of this class, boy was I ever wrong. I used it a lot in my FBLA competitions (Future Business Leaders of America) and it helped me be able to read people when I am talking to them. I learned that the way people perceive me can change based on my speech. After I learned how to give a public speech I went on to figure out how it could be used to fake confidence. One way to fake confidence is to not mumble and talk with a full voice and not to fidget. I found out that when I talked to some business executives that one of the biggest things that leaves a big impression on them is the way a person speaks. It helped me understand how to make a better first impression. It also helped me in the opposite way as well. Previously I had been unable to tell if one was lying to me but after some harsh criticism from a teacher I gained an unexpected skill. That was how to determine when what another person was saying to me was a lie or maybe not the whole truth or they were unsure of what to say. I learned that when people say um or uh a lot they are trying to find the words to say. I also learned that when people sway while talking or fidget with their body it means that they are nervous as they talk and you need to be a little wary of what is being said. That's why when I refer to the things I learn as tools on a toolbelt I feel as though every tool on that belt has multiple purposes.

Education is about taking the things you learn in life and using them to grow as a person and thinker. There is no greater meaning or purpose I get from the adventures I have or the stories I hear. I can only view the things that I learn as tools. Now that's not the same for everyone, Tara Westover in *Educated* thinks of education as to how you

change and the process of becoming a newer version of yourself. Then there's Alexie who wrote "The Joy of Reading: Superman and Me" whose view on education is similar to me but he views it more as his savior and his way to save others. To me education is about taking the things you have learned whether it be in school or just through life and using them to have a better life. It is a lot similar to how Tara Westover where she takes everything she does to build a new version of herself. So in the end, even the most similar definitions of education will still be different because education is how you as an individual view it.

Word Vomit and Educational Progress

Jessica Hodges

When I think about my life as it pertains to literacy, I think about my stepmother and her determination to teach me to read. I think about the countless books I have read, whether they were mine or borrowed from a library. I think about poems, the ones I remember and the ones I once had memorized. I think about the poetry I used to write and the words I never put on paper. I think about journaling and the thoughts I share online, with friends and with strangers. I think about starting college and the nervous feelings around needing to write essays after fourteen years of absence from formal schooling. When I think about my life in terms of literacy, I think about the people and experiences that led me to where I am today, and I think reading and writing may be the skills I need most in my pursuit of a better life.

When I was six years old, I did not enjoy learning to read, but that is quite the opposite of how I would grow to feel about reading. I didn't know how to read when I started kindergarten. I don't remember reading lessons in kindergarten, though I am sure we had them. What I remember are the days my stepmother would sit down on the couch with me, determined to get me to read an entire book. I knew my letter sounds, but the ability to blend the sounds together hadn't quite clicked yet. Sounding out words was tedious and frustrating. Being made to sit on the couch and get through an entire book, regardless of how short the book was, seemed like torture. It didn't help that we always read in the coldest room in the house. I would squirm and flop around on the couch, annoying my stepmom. Eventually, I would sit still long enough to finish the book, and then I would run off to play. I don't remember exactly when I started to blend

the sounds together, but when I did, reading became far more interesting. Once I started reading, it was difficult to get me to stop. I would plop down just about anywhere with a book and read out loud, which eventually started to annoy my stepmother. She would ask me to read to myself, read in my head, but I didn't understand what she meant. She started asking me to read in other places, like my bedroom, until I managed to figure out how to read without speaking. Without my stepmother's guidance and determination, I don't know that I would be reading at the level I am today.

As time passed, my love for reading grew. In middle school, I found I could easily get through a chapter book in a day, and I loved to read books that linked together or shared a universe or theme. Series like *Goosebumps* and *Animorphs* were favorites. I also took great pleasure in reading poetry. I loved, and still love, Rudyard Kipling's "If" and Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven." William Ernest Henley's "Invictus" is one of my favorites. If I had downtime between the ages of 6 and 17, I was probably reading. I could be in the car, on the bus, on the couch, in bed, or just about anywhere else with my nose stuck in a book. I would read in class before the bell rang, and I would start reading again if I finished my work early. Much like Sherman Alexie said of himself in "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me," I would stay up late, reading until I started to fall asleep (187). I still do this every now and then, whether I am reading for pleasure, reading the news, or trying to get through the last chapter I need for one of my classes. My love of reading enables me to absorb information in a way I enjoy.

In middle school, I took an interest in writing; unfortunately, it withered in high school. All of my reading of poetry compilation books had inspired me to write some poems of my own. I remember having a poem up on Poetry.com, and I thought that was quite an achievement at the time. I later realized that anyone could have a poem up on

the website; all they had to do was submit their work. When I was in high school, I had an idea for a book. It wasn't a fully-formed idea. I had a title and a vague idea of the protagonist. She was a woman turned into a vampire against her will. She was witty and sexy, with pale skin and dark red hair. She was a bit of a country girl, with a love of rock and roll. When I tried to write about her, I never got past the first page. I didn't have a story; I still don't. Despite the years I spent on message boards, telling stories by going back and forth with other users, each posting what our own characters were doing and waiting for others to respond, I still seem unable to create a story on my own. I prefer reading to writing; I always have. After I learned how to blend the letter sounds together, reading came as easily as breathing. I could write short poems about horses and death, but write a book? That felt impossible. There was a nagging voice in my head telling me that I could not do it, that I would fail if I tried. In "The Watcher at the Gates," Gail Godwin writes about having a "restraining critic who lived inside [her] and sapped the juices from green inspirations" (194). In a work of Freud, quoting a letter by Schiller, Godwin finds the idea of a watcher at the gates of the mind where ideas pour through. Its purpose seems to be to criticize ideas and sort the good from the bad, but it often criticizes too early, discarding ideas before they can be proven to be worthwhile. I never developed my story because I never got past writing the first page; I looked at my work, and my inner critic said it was garbage. This played out several times before I gave up. The criticism laid on me by my own mind has made writing more difficult, but I am learning this is a difficulty that many writers encounter.

When I was sixteen years old, I started journaling online; I couldn't have predicted how beneficial that would turn out to be. The idea of a diary had never appealed to me, but the idea of one online, in which I could write out my thoughts with

some degree of anonymity and still share with my trusted friends, intrigued me. It was communication, but it wasn't direct. I could publish my thoughts as I experienced them, without editing to suit someone else, and without tripping over my words. I eventually realized that this is how I communicate best, especially in times of conflict or when emotions are high. It is so much easier to talk to someone about a point of contention when they are not staring me in the face. In "The Love of Books," Gloria Naylor talks about writing in the diary her mother gave her when she was twelve years old: "... I made the vital connection between inarticulate feeling and the written word" (200). I used my online journal much the same way she used her diary, saying the things I could not say aloud and the things I may not have had the best words for at the time. My journaling aided me in developing the skills that helped me communicate with people more directly.

I can't remember a time in middle or high school when I thought a rough draft was actually necessary; I am finding this is not the case in college. Previously, I would copy my rough draft, word for word, and turn in what was essentially the same paper; the only difference was it was written in ink and in handwriting that was slightly neater. When I wrote the first draft of my first college paper, I didn't realize it was an utter mess. It was poorly organized, poorly formatted, and included a lot of unnecessary information. It was also something like twelve pages long; I only needed two. In "Shitty First Drafts," Anne Lamott writes,

The first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing that no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later. You just let this childlike part of you channel whatever voices and visions come through and onto the page. . . . If the kid wants to get into really

sentimental, weepy, emotional territory, you let him. Just get it all down on paper because there may be something great in those six crazy pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational, grown-up means (196).

That is essentially what happened with the first draft of my first college essay. It was, for lack of a better phrase, word vomit. It had to come out, so it did. With some guidance from my English professor, I was able to shape that mess into a paper that made sense. I've realized that I wouldn't have been able to get to that point without the mess that preceded it.

Sherman Alexie writes that his love of books during childhood was not merely a love of reading, but also a means to an end; he was trying to save his life, and now I am trying to save the lives of myself and my children (187). Reading and writing allowed Alexie an education he otherwise would not have been able to pursue. Where I was raised, education beyond a certain point was not judged the same way that it was on the reservation in Alexie's childhood. While I was encouraged to read and write and learn as much as I could, Alexie was judged by his classmates for participating in classes led by teachers from outside the reservation(186). Nevertheless, he persisted. Alexie was not satisfied with the life he was expected to have. He had bigger plans, and his education would allow him to work towards them (187). In contrast to Alexie, I have never had much in the way of long-term goals. As recently as last winter, I did not expect college to be in my future. I didn't have the funds, and I wasn't certain that I had the academic ability. Over the summer, I submitted a Free Application for Federal Student Aid on a whim, and I applied to Missouri Western State University shortly after. I figured the worst thing that could happen is rejection, so why not? When I was approved for both, it was a bit of a shock; I was suddenly confronted with the fact that college was actually an

option for me. I had thought I would need to teach myself some kind of skill if I wanted a career. I have gotten by since high school with primarily minimum wage jobs and the support of family and close friends; I can't support my children and myself in this way indefinitely; I need to try to better our circumstances before they change in a negative and potentially catastrophic way. The skills I am cultivating now, including writing, are necessary for success.

I wouldn't be where I am now without reading and writing. I have gone from a child sitting on the couch with her stepmother, not quite able to put the sounds together to get through a book, to a bookworm who reads well into the night. I have gone from a teenager who couldn't stand her own writing, to a mother writing essays for college classes. My ability to absorb information through reading and convey it through writing seems to be the key to my future, and I fully intend to unlock it.

Hard Work Pays Off

Katelyn Koehler

What is the first thing you think of when you think of the word education? To me, it's a very important piece of my life and it's also important to the authors that go by the names of Gloria Naylor and Frederick Douglass. Gloria Naylor is the amazing writer of the essay, "The Love of Books." In this essay she writes about her experience with education throughout her years and how it played a role in her life. If it wasn't for her great role model, her mother, then she wouldn't be where she is today. Her mother was raised in a way she didn't want her children, Naylor and her siblings, to be raised. She had to work extremely hard for the things she wanted, including books to read. When she speaks to her children she says, "It was no sin to be poor. But the greatest sin is to keep people from learning to dream" (Naylor 199). "Books taught the young how to dream" (Naylor 199). Naylor kept those wise words close to her heart, from her mother, and did the exact same thing she did. Her love of books became very strong and she was determined to become a successful writer in her future. It all started with the library, a place where she was educated the most. Frederick Douglass is the other outstanding author of the essay, "How I learned to Read and Write." In his essay he tells us about his home life growing up and how he was taught, by himself, to read and write. He was raised in the times of slavery and it was not easy. He was told, by his mistress in her words, "Education and slavery were incompatible with each" (Douglass 190). It was very uncommon for a slave to be educated in these times, but that made him want to be educated more than ever because he knew a lot of them weren't. The thought of being a slave for the rest of his life sickened him and that's when he picked up his very first

book, after that moment he was reading and writing everything. He can proudly say that he taught himself how to read and write, it wasn't easy but he did it. Like these authors, I too went through some things that changed who I was as a person and strengthened and sometimes even weakened my education. But, if you put your mind to something and you are determined to get there, you will. Education, just like any other thing is not just handed to you, you have to prioritize and work for it. Yes it will be hard and yes it will affect you in many ways, but it will also be very rewarding in the end.

Shyness. Really think about this word and how it not only affects who you are as a person, but it also affects how you learn in the classroom. Well, for Gloria Naylor and I, we can relate to the idea of shyness. We both, at a young age, were handed the amazing gift of a journal from our mothers. In this journal they wanted us to write down everything we were thinking without having to speak and say it all to them. This gave us the comfort of knowing that we did say how we felt, but, it was all written down. We didn't have to physically say it to anyone, it was ours and ours only. In the essay "The Love of Books," Naylor says, "I was, one of three girls, perhaps her most gifted child (the teachers came to understand that later as well because I always excelled in the written tests)," (Naylor 200). She describes how she was more of a writer than a speaker or reader and it helped her excel in her writing assignments. In her journal she would write down in her words, "all the things that I could not say" (Naylor 200). She was so shy to say anything to anyone and that's why she would write it all down in her journal. This helped her writing skills soar and take off. She would write down all these things and as the days and weeks went on she would do an excellent job on her writing assignments. I too, am one of three girls and by far the one who would rather write everything down rather than speak and read it all out to anyone. My teachers would tell my mom that I

was such a good writer and even though I wasn't the best at the math tests or the science tests, they always knew I was going to do excellent on the writing tests. My education was, and still is, a very important piece of my life and shyness has had a factor in how it has turned out. Naylor and I can both agree that it did have a big effect for our educational careers. But, we overcame it and because our mothers gave us those journals, our education has skyrocketed. Personalities do play a big role in how your education plays out, but if you find ways to cope with it you will get over that hurdle just like me and Naylor did and you will proudly be able to say, "I did it."

Textbooks, internet, pencils, paper. Are those the first things that come to your mind when you think of education? Speaking for myself, those were the first things I thought of when I first thought of education. You never think about it in detail, it's always the obvious things such as those items. But, education for Gloria Naylor is where her learning career started, and that's the library. At a young age her mother would take her and her sisters to the public library to, in her words, "educate us" (Naylor 199). Every Time she walked in there her face lit up with excitement. In the essay "The Love of Books," she says, "I was eager to discover whatever mystery was within the ink upon that paper, because also within me-and this had to be genetic-was a fascination within the written word" (Naylor 199). Books were her escape from reality and because she was a very shy child, she had a hard time in school and even sometimes at home and books helped her get through those difficult times. The ones she enjoyed reading the most were Louisa May Alcott's which included *Little Women*, *Little Men*, and *Fo's Boys* and she also loved Laura Ingalls Wilder's which included *Little House on the Prairie*, *Little House in the Big Woods*, and *Those Happy Golden Years*. Not only did she love these two authors but she also read all the books, starting with A and ending with Z, in the

children's section of this library. For me, the library is, yes, a special place, but it's not where I started my education. I started my education by going to school and learning from each one of my teachers all throughout elementary, middle, and high school. I didn't have to do it myself, they were there to guide me the whole way through. I wasn't much of a reader and when I would go into a library I wouldn't even want to check out any books. For me, escaping from reality meant writing down everything so I was the only one who saw and read it, no one else, just me. I would write about how I was feeling that day, was I sad, was I happy, was I angry? It didn't matter because I knew I would write it down on some paper, some time that day and I would feel better instantly. To make sure I was writing everything correctly my teacher would come look it over and talk me through it. I will never forget the time when I was in third grade and I was not having a good day at all. I decided to stay in from recess, which was my favorite time of the day, to just talk and write out everything with my teacher. She told me, "Okay Katelyn I want you to write down five things that make you happy." I wrote down my best friend's name and my four other family members, my mom, my dad, and my two sisters. Then she said, "Look over your list and think of all the great things that each one of those people have done for you." I could think of so many things it was crazy! I thought of happy and funny moments and each one of them made me smile and laugh. After that I was feeling so much better. It really does take a big smile and a good laugh for your day to feel better! I was the kind of student to where I would rather have my teacher read to me than actually reading it by myself. The books I read did not help me through my difficult situations like they did for Naylor. My family and friends helped me and the last thing I would do when going through those situations was open a book. Everyone is different depending on how they were first educated, some say it was in the

library, others say it was simply just listening to the teacher. Either way, just the thought of being educated in any way is important, whether it was by your teacher or you taught yourself. Take pride in it and be grateful that you were educated in the way you were.

In Frederick Douglass's essay, "How I Learned to Read and Write," he tells us how he's a ready listener. When put in any situation he is always ready for what is about to be said. Being the way he was, it made learning new things much easier for him. Every new word he heard he said, "Hearing the word in this connection very often, I set about learning what it meant" (Douglass 192). This is when his education took off. He was so eager to learn, and because it was so uncommon for the slaves to be educated, he decided to take action and do it himself. He first learned to read and to do this he read the book, "The Columbian Orator." Every chance he got, he read this book. After that moment he was reading everything. Then came the writing. To learn this he would copy down things from different texts and in his words these copied texts he wrote were called, "copy-books" (Douglass 193). After years of "copy-books" (Douglass 193) he successfully learned how to write. He proved to everyone who wasn't a slave that he could actually write. The other kids would respond, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it" (Douglass 192). Then he would prove them all wrong because they realized that he actually could. I too am like Douglass in many ways. I was very much a ready listener and I'm always looking forward to what is about to be said. This has helped me tremendously in my education because when I listen I get a better understanding of what is being told to me. I also, like Douglass, connect things, or try to connect things together, to get a better understanding of it. This has helped me succeed in many of my classes, especially the science ones because if I hear something I know was talked about in the previous section I will look back on that section and try my best to really figure

out what it means. I like to do the research and figure it out by myself rather than asking someone and I feel like Douglass was the same way. One specific time I remember doing this was my junior year of high school and we were learning about fruit flies for the whole semester and how specific things affect how they produce offspring. I didn't understand why we were doing this experiment in the first place so I did lots of research over it. I looked up all the different types of fruit flies and how each thing in the container that held the fruit flies affected how each type of fly produced their offspring. Just by doing this research independently helped me to successfully explain to the rest of my classmates what to expect and it helped me pass a lot of assignments and tests. I successfully passed that class with a good grade and just by doing that research by myself helped me out a lot. Douglass also likes to prove people wrong and make them know that he can do anything they can do. I am the same way. I like to make sure people know that just because I might not be as outgoing or I may not learn the same way they do but that doesn't mean I don't know what they know. I like to prove them wrong by actually speaking and voicing my opinion and actually say the way I learned, it might be different from them but it's still right. Lots of people tell me the same thing they told Douglass "I don't believe you" (Douglass 192), but Douglass proved them wrong and so did I. Just by listening and really understanding what is being told to you has a huge role in your education. If you listen like Douglass and I do you can also prove people wrong if they don't believe what you're telling them.

The way we were raised does, and will, have an affect on how you will become educated. Frederick Douglass was raised a slave and it affected him. He was told that slaves weren't supposed to be educated and it was uncommon for them to be. Even children his age who weren't slaves were probably told that slaves aren't educated and if

they tell you they are then don't believe them because they aren't. Douglass wanted to change that about his life, he wanted to be educated. It was very hard to do because a lot of people told him that slavery and education don't go together. In the essay "How I Learned to Read and Write," Douglass says, "Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper" (Douglass 190). His mistress would get angry at him for wanting to read. Imagine wanting something so bad but can't have it because it's not what your family wants for you. Shouldn't you get to make your own decisions? I think so, but Douglass was raised in a home where education was forbidden. He didn't want that for himself, I mean would you? He had to teach himself everything he wanted to know about reading and writing. He didn't have the luxury of not having to do it all yourself, he had to do it himself and he did a great job of doing it. I cannot relate to Douglass on the behalf of the way he was raised. I was raised in a great homelife and I didn't have to teach myself everything there is to know about reading and writing. I had great teachers and a great school to guide me through my years starting with preschool all the way to senior year. Having an education and even a college degree is very important to my family and each one of my siblings and I are frowned upon if we don't further our education after high school. My parents want the best for us and going to college and getting a good job is the first step. I agree with them though and I am very happy that I did go to college. If education is really important to you you will find a way to get through it. Douglass got through it and he values education so much because he went through so much to get it. I value education as well, and even though I didn't go through what he went through it's still very important to me and I value the times right now as I'm going through college. Just like Douglass teaches himself, it may seem like a lot of work but he did it and so can you. Some things aren't just handed to you, you have

to go out work for what you want, even an education. It can be done, but how bad do you want it.

Education is an important piece of me and it has shaped me into the person I am today. It has taught me to grow and overcome many things and it's taught me that you have to work for what you want in this life. It's not handed to you and you're the only person to determine how your future will lay out. Like these two authors, Gloria Naylor and Frederick Douglass, I overcame the things in my life that were holding me back from my education. You are important and you exist in this educational world. It doesn't matter who you are, where you're from, you deserve the same things that everyone else does. If education isn't the most important thing in your life then that's okay. Be you and don't think that you have to get an education to be like the others. Whatever you do, make sure it's important to you. Lots of things in your life, including your educational journey, will have its ups and downs, but you, just like these two amazing authors and myself, will get through it and you'll push yourself to no end if it's what you really want. Your education career will shape you into the person you've always wanted to become and life will be very rewarding in the end.

The Journey
Nicole Krzyzaniak

It's hard to go back to the time when I was a child, my father was an alcoholic, and a single mother raised me for a short time, that was until my stepfather came into the picture. My stepfather helped my mother raised me. I was never read to as a child unless I visited my grandma. I'd always played with her can goods and thought about the words on the cans but could never understand them. Reading and writing were a mystery to me. The only thing I remember was saying and spelling my name; speech was difficult for me. I stuttered way too often. I never understood how to sound a word out, let alone say it correctly. That's when I was placed in special education classes. While being in special education classes honed my skills in life, it came with its many challenges.

When I entered the first grade as a six-year-old, my struggles came to me as flashing lights. I was behind with the rest of the children; they read independently while I stumbled over the words. I could write my name very well for a six-year-old, I must add! My first-grade teacher knew about my disadvantages and got together with my mother. That's when I was first introduced to taking an IEP. It's a personalized learning plan that meets the needs and goals of a child with a disability. That's when I stepped foot into another classroom. I was met with a kind and gentle teacher who spoke so softly. My Special Ed teacher introduced me to an array of children's books. There she helped me pronounce R-A-B-B-I-T and S-P-A-G-H-E-T-T-I, words that I could not say correctly. "Wabbit" was how I understood rabbit, and "pasgetti" was spaghetti. The words I learned in grade school were foreign to me because I never thought to sound

them out, and when I finally understood how to pronounce them correctly. I knew from that moment the purpose of their meaning. In *“Superman and Me,”* Sherman Alexie introduces, “The words themselves were mostly foreign, but I still remember the exact moment when I first understood, with a sudden clarity, the purpose of a paragraph” (186). Similarly to Alexie, I was introduced to many new and exciting books, books with chapters, books with no pictures, and books that were huge to my young mind. “I realized that a paragraph was a fence that held words” (186-187). I finally understood the purpose of those long texts, as Alexie did. Paragraphs held the words together. They expressed the writer’s point of view, Thoughts on a particular moment that are unique to that topic.

I came to be comfortable with my environment, the teacher, my new friends, and those array of children’s books. I got so good at spelling those words like binoculars, animal, hospital, yellow, red, green, etc. My Special Ed teacher let me participate in the spelling test, which was awarded in a soda if you got all answers correct! I answered each of the questions correctly, but I did it with my teacher’s and peers’ support. They took the time to help me, sit down with me, and, most of all, be patient with me. My classes became more comfortable for me. By the time I entered middle school, I had grasped my knowledge and excelled in courses like history and science, but I still struggled in English. Much like Westover, “American history was getting easier, but only in that I was no longer failing the quizzes outright. I was doing well in music theory, but I struggled in English. My teacher said I had a knack for writing but that my language was oddly formal and stilted” (161). Similarly to Westover, I wrote beautiful and informant stories, but my words were everywhere; I had no structure. I lacked grammar, and I tended to write without reviewing my paper. Thankfully, I had my Special Ed

teacher, Ms. Young, who, of all of my Special Ed teachers, was an easy-going, laid-back, straightforward teacher. She showed me a way to break down my writing and see where I had my missteps. She paced me, and guided me to correct my grammar errors in a way that I comprehend. I met Ms. Young in Middle school; she changed my outlook on learning; of all my Special Ed teachers I had throughout the years, she left an impact on my life. I'll never forget the passion she had for her students.

In my freshman year of high school, I was up for another IEP. My counselor discussed with my mother how well I was doing and told her they would place me in regular classes. I was scared and did not want to go into regular classes; their classroom work was more problematic. They weren't like my Special Ed teachers, calm and patient with me, their classwork was easier for me to comprehend. My counselor reassured me they will always be there to help me. Stepping foot into regular classes for the first time felt like a whole new world. Much like Westover, she recounts the first time she steps into a classroom. "I stood awkwardly in the back until the professor, a thin woman with delicate features, motioned for me to take the only available seat, which was near the front. I sat down, feeling the weight of everyone's eyes" (155). Similarly to Westover's experience, I had arrived at my first class late. It was English, and I had no idea which side of the building the room was at. A thin but kind woman came up to my desk and handed me a book titled, "*Go Ask Alice*." I flipped through the book, noting to myself how I was going to read this book in a short time! I felt overwhelmed. But I was devoted to myself. It was the first time I read a book like this one before as it struggled with addiction. It related to me on a personal level as my father was an alcoholic.

I began well at reading those long chapter books. "*Island of the Blue Dolphins*" was a personal favorite that I read on my own time. However, like Alexie, "I read

anything that had words and paragraphs. I read with equal parts joy and desperation. I love those books, but I also knew that love had only one purpose. I was trying to save my life” (187). Much like Alexie, I started to read anything that caught my interest, books with long text, and anything that related to me or gave my joy. *A Child Called “It”* was another book I read on my own time that was introduced to me by a friend. It was the hardest book I’ve ever read, and the only book that brought tears to my eyes. Reading was a salvation to my life because it taught me many things. Things that I didn’t know. Things I’ve learned, and things with meaning. I wanted to make a difference in my life as growing up for me was hard.

Throughout my high school career came with its challenges, but it also came with many rewarding life moments. As I sit here now, typing this college essay for my English class. I wouldn’t have made it this far without all of my Special Ed teachers, and especially Ms. Young, for their dedication to their students. But not only them like Alexie, “I refused to fail. I was smart. I was arrogant. I was lucky” (187). Smarilialy to Alexie, I was lucky to have help. I refused to fail even at a young age, and I was smart. I just needed that little push to move past that mental barrier I put up. But at the same time, I was arrogant. I wouldn’t listen to my teachers, and half the time could care less of what they said and did for me. I thought I had the answer to everything. That wasn’t the case. I knew nothing. They set the right course for me and made the right decisions. They knew my upbringing and took that into account to help better my learning experience. I made it into honor classes during my sophomore year of high school. In addition to Westover, she imagined “ myself in Cambridge, a graduated student wearing a long black robe that swished as I strode through ancient corridors” (241). Much like Westover, I also imagined what it would be like to wear a long robe that symbolizes

completing my education. Looking no farther, that dream became a reality as I won a spot on the Lampion Honor Society. I managed to keep a GPA of 4.0 and was one of the top 10 in my graduating class.

Looking back on my education experience shaped my future, and I wouldn't be the person I am today without reading and writing without all my Special Ed teachers' support that helped me along the way. I didn't grow up with my mother reading me bedtime stories or sitting on the couch learning to read those Dr. Seuss or "*Good Night Moon*" stories. I was fortunate to learn to spell my name before entering Kindergarten. But most of all, Ms. Young, my Special Ed teacher who never gave up on me, knew I was the most brilliant person she had taught. She believed in me to succeed in the future. I couldn't have done anything if it wasn't for the help and support, she showed me. One would say I solved the mystery of reading and writing and now succeed in my future going forward.

Your Own Personal Fight

Brooklynn Leal

You sit in silence, waiting for something to pop in your head. You have a paper due the next day but you just can't seem to find the right words. It is a place we have all been, alone with the panic of not knowing what may be on the final exam. Some students learn with ease, never failing an exam, never sitting in a classroom completely clueless as to what was being taught, but others must fight, they fight so hard that it almost doesn't seem worth it. Almost, until that moment when all the late nights up studying become rewarding. What happens when your mental stability is put on the line just for the sake of passing a class? In *"Educated"* by Tara Westover we are taught how sometimes learning comes naturally and other times you must push yourself. We learn that sometimes our personal life and our mental health can impact how we perform in school. For some people learning is easy and for others it causes pain and disappointment. To be Educated does not mean you are a well knowledgeable person, it means to push through even the hardest of days, to change the dark and grey and create a beautiful world.

The Struggle can be the worst, just spending all your time completely clueless as to what is going on in a class. Despite all the effort you have put into just being somewhat aware of the information being taught. Westover was never taught things normal kids were taught, she didn't know the impact of the Holocaust or the meaning of the N-word. Once she arrived on campus she could feel the difference between her and the other students in small moments when everyone knew what was happening except her, "... The professor instructed everyone to take out their bluebook. I barely had time

to wonder what a blue book was before everyone produced one from their bags.”(Westover 161) Westover took that exam completely clueless as to what she was supposed to be saying. She did not understand that it took more than just paying attention in class to learn the content of the class. After that first exam, Westover learned she had to put more effort into learning than she had first accepted, “This time I made flashcards, I spent hours memorizing odd spelling, many of them french... I could not say them but I could spell them.”(Westover 165) Westover took extensive notes and studied flashcards but it still hadn’t been enough. She reached out to a classmate for help only to discover that all the stuff she had been studying was great but there was even more she had to learn, “I stared at her I did not understand. This was a class on music and art. We’d been given CDs with music to listen to and a book with pictures of art to look at. It hadn’t occurred to me to read the art book any more than to read the CDs.” (Westover 166). Westover had never sat in a class until going to college, she didn’t think of the importance of the words on the pages compared to the words her teacher had spoken. Learning is not always easy, it is not always exactly how you imagine it to be. Growing up I constantly struggled in school, no matter how much effort I put into learning something I just was not able to comprehend a lot of what was being taught to me. I often found myself become frustrated and ashamed of the grade I as receiving and felt stupid when I did not understand things as quickly as my peers. Over the course of the school life I have learned that it does not matter if I do not understand as quickly as other and it may take a lot more effort for me to truly understand what I am learning but in the end as long as I feel I had tried my hardest and done all I need to do to feel successful then that is all that matters. You can tell yourself, ‘this year I am going to throw all of me into learning this is going to be a great year’ and you believe it

until your brain starts telling you how much a failure you are and you no longer have the energy or motivation to complete the simplest of tasks.

In life we focus so much on the idea that school must be put first, that getting an education is at the top of the list. But then teachers do not make accommodations for the students who learn differently, the ones who suffer mentally and can not get up and out of bed most days. We are taught to suppress the pain and push through, what happens when you can't. In life I have learned more about being educated from sitting alone in my room just trying to feel something than I have sitting aimlessly in a classroom reviewing the quadratic formula. To be successful you have to have focus and determination, you have to want to succeed before you can actually succeed. Every person's perspective on life is different, no two people lead the same lives. Some struggle more than others, whether it be a chemical imbalance in their brain telling them they are not worthy or the trauma they have faced coming to the surface affecting the ability to process things they are being taught. Being educated is how you take the pain and misery and shape it into something beautiful. Westover was in the process of completing her PhD when her family had pushed her aside and 'shunned' her. She fell into a deep dark hole which inevitably affected her progress, "He (Westover's PhD supervisor) had no idea why it had been nearly a year since I'd sent him work, so when we met in his office one overcast July afternoon, he suggested I quit... I went to the library and gathered half a dozen books, which I lugged to my room and arranged on my desk. But my mind was made nauseous by rational thought and by the next morning the books had moved to my bed where they propped up my laptop" (Westover 314). Students who struggle with mental stability often have moments when they feel alright and those moments then find the motivation to get out of bed and confront the mess they have

created but that motivation flees just as fast as it arrives. Like Westover I do my fair share of struggling, I was diagnosed with ADHD and depression at a very young age. There are months when I fall apart and nothing else in this world matters except the undeniable emptiness I am faced with. How alone in this world I feel when I am shouting from the roof that I need help that I can't handle living like this anymore but no one is there to aid me. I am learning how to take hold of my life and not let the chemical imbalance in my brain take over my life, "I sent Dr. Runciman the draft, and a few days later we met in his office. He sat across me and, with a look of astonishment, said it was good. 'Some parts of it are very good' he said. He was smiling now. 'I'll be surprised if it doesn't earn a doctorate'" Westover relished in her misery for a long while but eventually she was able to hold focus. She decided it was time to pick up her paper and begin again. She had decided to take misery and turn into something that will help her in life and better her.

Being educated does not always mean being the smartest person in the room but it is how we take the hardest moments and let them shape us. Rather than letting it tear us down, we let it rise us up. People learn differently, some stay up late nights just trying to comprehend the words on the page while others study a few hours just before a test and can know everything on it. In *Educated* by Tara Westover we learn that struggle can appear in many different ways, whether it be a mental struggle or a comprehensional struggle. We also learn that the fight may take a lot of energy and frustration but in the end it is all worth it. Education is not all about how well you are doing but more about how hard you are trying. Mental health can have impacts on the way a person learns and becomes educated, it can cause a person to become unmotivated and unable to function like they normally can. But having a mental illness does not mean you won't succeed, to

be educated you must not let the imbalance take over your future. To be educated you must learn from the moments when you have tried your hardest and the days full of darkness to push through and never give up on who you want to be

Being Educated Got Me To Dream Big

Cierra Pitts

I am sitting in my freshman English class getting asked what I think education and literacy means to me. This was a hard question for me but then I realized that if I didn't do reading or take my education seriously I wouldn't be in college today. Getting an education was also important to Tara Westover, Frederick Douglas, Debra Anderson, and Gloria Naylor. Education was important to them because it was their way to escape the lives they lived and get them something better in life. Westover got away from her abusive brother and parents. Fredrick started to write and read because he was a slave and he fed off people telling him he couldn't and he would prove them wrong. Anderson started reading because she loved the way books made her escape the reality she lived. Naylor liked the "high" she got from reading and escaping reality. When I was younger and had to read I thought it was stupid and that I didn't need it but moving forward I started reading things that I was interested in and realizing that reading wasn't that bad. I started to enjoy reading books that were in my interest and started taking my education seriously so that I could go to college to further my education. Reading and a good education was something that I didn't need when I was a younger kid, but then I realized when I got older that reading was something I needed to be successful and learn in nursing school so I could help babies.

You have to learn to read and write before you can accomplish anything else further in reading and writing. Douglas and I were very determined to get a better education in reading. In the essay, "How I Learned to Read and Write," Frederick Douglas a slave learned how to read and write from his mistress until she had to stop

teaching him so he had to start teaching himself. “I always took my book with me , and by going one part of my errand quickly, I found time to get a lesson before my return” (Douglas 191). Douglas would make sure that he had time to get a lesson in before he got back to his mistress because he was determined to learn how to read. Douglas would carry a basket of bread around when he did his errands and he would give it to the hungry little urchins who in exchange would give Douglas the more valuable bread of knowledge. Not that I had to sneak around to learn how to read but reading wasn’t always easy for me, I had to go to special reading classes until the sixth grade and it was embarrassing. This classroom felt empty because it was only me and three other kids and we learned how to read from small books like *Cat In The Hat* and repetitive books to *A Wrinkle in Time*. Once I learned to read and got to go back to the classroom with my friends I understood that I accomplished something big. I understood how to read now and how to comprehend what the reading meant. In the essay, “How I Learned to Read and Write,” Frederick Douglas learning how to read helped him get out of slavery “The Columbia Orator every opportunity I got, I used this book. I found it in a dialogue between a master and a slave” (Douglas 191). Douglas read this book all the time because it made him want to learn more and the slave in the story turned out to be super smart and it allowed him to free himself and convince his master to free him. Education meant to Douglas a “new life” because no one believed that blacks could do anything with reading and writing. I was the same way; kids made fun of me because I had to go to the reading class when I was younger but when I got back in the classroom I proved them wrong that I could do it. I had to learn how to read before I could go back to the classroom and read with my classmates so we both accomplished how to read.

Reading was something that I didn't need when I was a younger kid but then I realized when I got older that reading would need it to be successful. In the essay, "On the Move," Debra Anderson came from a family that didn't really have money and her parents didn't finish sixth or eighth grade. "My earliest memory of a library was in the Clarkfield elementary school" (Anderson 355). Debra's parents hadn't completed more than the sixth and eighth grade. Anderson didn't care if people knew that her parents fought a lot and her dad was drunk almost all the time. When they moved to Echo in October that was the first move that would ever leave Anderson isolated, and depressed. She read books because they let her escape the chaos of her family and the move to Echo. The first place that I picked up a book was the library at my school. We were in first grade and we finally got to go to this secret place that the older kids always got to go to. When I walked in there were just shelves along the walls and tables in the middle of the floor filled with so many books it was crazy and overwhelming. This place was so cool to finally discover and it was somewhere I would spend some days to get away from all the chaos. The first book that I ever picked up was a *Magic Tree House* book. In the essay, "On the Move" Debra says, "It had, what seemed, shelves and shelves of books all the way to the ceiling" (Anderson 355). Debra was amazed by all the books that filled the room as when I myself in first grade stepped into the library thought wow look at all these books it was amazing and I couldn't wait to read them. You have to find something that you love about books. Naylor didn't come from a family that had a lot of money so she has to spend a lot of time in the public libraries and she felt that she could escape from everything around her. Gloria Naylor's mother would always say in the essay, "The Love for Books," Do you see all these books? Once you can write your name, all of these books will be yours. For two weeks. But yours." "I had to get much older to understand

why she took us on these pilgrimages. While indeed it was to educate us” (Naylor 199). You can only start loving books when you find what you really love to read and that was hard for me to understand when I was at a younger age. When I got into high school and started reading bigger books with different topics. Some of the topics that I was able to finish the whole book was murder mystery, books about abuse, and some romance novels. Junior year our English teacher made us read the first ten minutes of class. She picked out this book for me called *Three Little Words* by Ashley Rhodes-Courter once I started reading it I couldn’t put it down. It was about a little girl that had to go from foster home to foster home and she was abused throughout her times in foster homes. Gloria Naylor never really understood at a young age what books were supposed to be for. I was the same way when I had to read when I was younger. I didn’t want to and I thought that it was a waste of time. But once I got older I understood that reading was something you have to do the rest of your life and it helps you be educated. It is a good way to escape anything in your life. Gloria Naylor in the essay, “The Love for Books,” Books were to be my only avenue out of the walls my emotions built around me in those years. I felt trapped within my home and trapped within school, and it was through the pages of books that I was released into other worlds (Naylor 200). I found myself escaping the craziness when I was in a good book and it was relaxing.

Reading and Writing can change your life when you get older and you can make something big out of your life and people enjoy getting to read and write once they realize what it can do for you. Anderson read to escape her crazy chaos home because everyone has a painful story but with some good times as well. In the essay, “How Reading Changed My Life,” I was reminded of this as I read each of the authors’ stories. Reading changed their lives and for some, may have literally saved them. (Anderson

375) Reading was something that I started to enjoy because I got to escape to different worlds. What I liked in a good book was the fact that in some books I can escape to the scene and feel like I'm actually there and with everyone that is in that scene. As Debra Anderson said In the essay, "How Reading Changed My Life," Like Richard Rodriguez I didn't learn to love books from my parents. Reading was something you learned in school (Anderson 375). I learned to read when I started going to school. I didn't fully learn from my parents. Anderson found her escape through books and she realized that the authors that she read changed their life and then when she started more it started to change her life. I didn't think reading was something I needed when I got older but I read everyday no matter what it is because it is nice to escape from the craziness of the world that we have today.

Being educated is a privilege to some and some people that get an education by fighting for it are trying to escape something. Westover was someone that had to fight for education and she didn't go to school until she went to college when she was seventeen and she didn't realize what education meant until she graduated college. Tara Westover said, "Until that 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. That night I called on her and she didn't answer. She left me. She stayed in the mirror The decisions I made after that moment were not the ones she would have made. They were the choices of a changed person and a new self. Call this selfhood many things. Transformation. Metamorphosis. Falsity. Betrayal. I call this Education" (Westover 328-329). When she went off to college she struggled and still wanted to be the girl from home, once she graduated she realized

that she was a different person and that the girl she used to look at in the mirror isn't who she is anymore that she is better and it's because of education and education meant to her more than anything because she moved on from her family and she became independent. I never really knew what education meant to me until I was a Sophomore in high school and I realized that I wanted to be a nurse when I grew up. But I had to take my school seriously and I had to stay focused and get good grades so that I could go to college and further my education so I could get my dream job. Nursing is my dream job because my sister and brother were born premature at twenty-five weeks early and I just want to be able to be with babies like that. Junior year I got into the nursing program at Hillyard and I realized that this was my time to start focusing on my future and doing good things with my life. My senior year I started applying for colleges and I got my CNA certificate and now as a Freshman in college full time and managing a PRN job at Mosaic I have realized that education has been a big part of my life and that is why I'm where I am today in life. It took Tara a little bit of time to realize what education meant to her and her life and she has accomplished big things going to college. Education for me has made me the person I am today and writing this has made me realize that I have accomplished quite a bit of things in my life that I should be proud of and that's because I got the privilege to be educated my whole life.

Reading and a good education was something that I didn't need when I was a younger kid but then I realized when I got older that reading was something I needed to be successful. Education and reading can change anyone's life and sometimes it can help them and save them from something they didn't want to be a part of. Reading and being educated can give you a lot of good things in life. No matter where you come from, poor or rich if you want to accomplish being educated and reading all you have to do, put

your mind to it and you can accomplish anything you want to. Dream big and don't let anyone get in your way. Get an education and fight until the end because you can do it. I fought for the education I have today and so has Tara Westover in *Educated*, Fredrick Douglas "How I Learned to Read and Write", Debra Anderson "How Reading Changed My Life", and Gloria Naylor "The Love of Books."

Never Stop Learning

Randall Wood

To be educated to me means that you have a will to learn. The formal definition of the word educated is having been educated. To me it yes means this but more important it shows me that somebody wants to learn. In *Educated* by Tara Westover we are introduced to Tara and the interesting life and journey to becoming educated herself. From mental illness and abuse to not obtaining a Birth Certificate until she was 15, Tara keeps pushing to get more education and to get away from the abuse in her family. I relate all too well with Westover, however I also faced my own struggles in the process of becoming educated. I have suffered from abuse and mental illness around me, as well as trauma from the abuse and deaths of loved ones. A lot of this had led me in a quick and long downward spiral into drug addiction. Even though I was going through the ringer and having troubles in life I never stopped learning and becoming educated. Sure, not in the academic light for many years but educated in “street life.” That is me though someone who no matter where I am and what I am doing I want to continually learn new things. This is because to me to never stop learning is how somebody can become educated regardless of what you are learning. My definition of being educated is also the reason I am where I am today, in college. I am an Elementary Education major and I am passionate about this and becoming a teacher because I want nothing more than to help educate and mold younger minds to ensure our youth is properly educated and prepare for the world.

Ten years after I graduated from high school, I am a Freshman in college. But just because I have not been in a formal classroom setting does not mean I have stopped

learning. Exactly one year before I graduated from high school, I lost my father. January 31, 2009 I was introduced to a whole new world. I began to use recreational “club” drugs. These included MDMA, Acid, and A LOT of Methamphetamine. I made it to the end of high school without any issues, but as I think back I was lucky I had not lost control during that time or I would have not made it past my Senior year. Bringing all these substances into my life led me into a whole new environment which meant I had to learn many things to keep my life out of the hands of the legal system. I will say now that I do not condone any type of drug use of this variety. Medications and things prescribed by a medical professional if not abused is fine in my book. At the time I began finding myself in the wrong crowd at almost all times. I began to do whatever it took to make money and keep my habit at bay and have spending money at the same time. In a sense you could say I became all about the hustle. But being this way also kept the wrong types of people in my life which in a way becomes a lesson to learn. Unfortunately, you do not learn this lesson without many people messing your head up. But because of the “drama” in my life this is what brought me to start writing and journaling about certain shit going on in my life. I say shit because at the time it was much more than problems to me because of my addiction life was not full of anything other than SHIT! The shit is what made my obstacles and challenges with my writing start to become apparent, because I would attempt to paraphrase, and shorthand note in my journals. Because of this I could not really read what I had written which has led to holes and patches in my memory. I found myself doing these things to protect my mind from the bad things happening to me as Tara Westover did for many years of her life. Several years into this lifestyle I was raped by someone whom I had thought loved me. This was the incident that changed how I wrote and became the reason I find myself

writing more vividly today. On page 196 of *Educated* by Tara Westover she writes, “I rise from my bed, retrieve my journal, and do something I have never done before: I write what happened” (Westover 196). This is stemmed from a physical altercation she has with her brother Shawn. As Westover did, I began to write exactly what happened the night I was raped. Sadly, the night I was raped would only be one of many incidents that I had to learn from in that shit life I was living. But as time went on, I did come to my senses and got out alive, which not many can make it out alive.

The street life is not my only education that I feel as if I had to learn. After I began to get sober in life, I did ultimately decide that I wanted to further my academic education. This decision could not have been more amazing to me personally. Not only am I beginning on a path to my career as a teacher, but I am also bettering the writing skills I thankfully had retained from High School. Becoming a college student is forever going to change my life. Writing the essays I have been assigned in my classes are something I will be grateful for because I am getting more into writing than I ever have before. Because I had taken such a long break after high school and went down my dark path, I did not realize how much of my education I had retained in my memory. For many, many years I did not have a grasp on what most would consider a normal life. Until my first day of classes here at Missouri Western State University I was very isolated and scared to be in the world in fear that I might seek out old friends. This would ultimately lead me back down a path that I do not wish to ever venture down again. I became accustomed to a strict life that was put in place by the court system because of my addiction. And for a little over 2 years all I did was work, sleep, and attend anything my probation had required of me. But as that came to an end, I decided

I needed to switch things up. As Westover says in *Educated*, “I decided to experiment with normality. For nineteen years I’d lived the way my father wanted. Now I would try something else” (Westover 212). I had lived the way the court recommends and was succeeding, so I decided to try something else. I decided to try college!

Tara Westover’s *Educated* is a story of how the author Tara decided to leave the strict religious and abusive life she was so used to and further her education. From a backwoods country girl to a student at Cambridge University. The book is a true inspiration to people that come from abuse and mentally ill families that raise us. She in herself is truly an inspiration. She goes from being abused and tormented by her brother and father, writing basically lies in her journal entries to make them seem right in the way they abused her. To one day, as mentioned above, finally realizing she needs to account for memories of how they really happened and to not accept the abuse any longer. Reading about her journey and will to getting out of that life, no matter what trials I’ve faced that are different from Tara’s, has made me look back and realize that I too have always kept a will and drive to become educated. As mentioned no I do not consider a chunk of me becoming educated to be formal education. But becoming educated does not have to come from a formal setting, PERIOD. No matter Westover’s hand she had delt to her did she give up on following her dreams to become educated. I too refuse to give up, which is why I have re-entered the formal education setting. My dream is to teach and to educate. In order to do that I must further my academic education.

To be educated to me is to never stop learning. If you are willing to learn and never stop, I believe you are educated. No matter where you find yourself in life,

whether you are on the streets addicted to drugs, in the workplace of a job you have never worked at, or in the classroom for the first time in 10 years, if you are willing to put in the work you are becoming educated. Tara Westover's *Educated* has made me realize that I have always had that drive to be educated. Becoming educated is what is molding us into the people we want to be. As I look back and recall my struggles with masking my past in writing I remember one of my favorite quotes from Westover, unfortunately I can not find the page number but I had written it down as I read one night and she says, "An education is not so much about making a living as making a person." I could not agree with that quote more! It speaks so much truth. I would say the same and add that you can always learn and educate yourself further no matter where and when.