

A photograph of a person from the waist up, wearing a red and white vertically striped long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. They are holding a stack of four books against their chest with both arms. The books have white covers and dark spines. The person is standing against a plain white background.

Fall 2013

***Discovering the Student
Discovering the Self***

Essays from English 100

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Introduction

Dawn Terrick

The essays that appear in this publication were selected by the English 100 Committee from submissions from English 100 students from the Spring and Fall 2012 semesters. The criteria used to evaluate and select these essays included content, originality, a sense of discovery and insight on the part of the student writer, control of form, language and sentence construction and representation of the various types of assignments students are engaged in while in this course. ENG 100, Introduction to College Writing, is a developmental composition course designed for students who show signs of needing additional work on their college-level writing before starting the regular general education composition classes. In this course, students learn about and refine their writing process with a strong focus on the act of revision, engage in critical reading, thinking and writing and write both personal and text-based essays. ENG 100 prepares students for the rigors of college-level writing and introduces them to college expectations.

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



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Black Snake Derby

Brian Bennet



"It's not just a bunch of girls in tutus skating around saying, 'Hee-hee, look at me, I'm cute,'" says Tanya Muckenthaler in regards to the sport of Women's Roller Derby. "Some people don't understand...that derby is a real sport."

Muckenthaler recently laced up her quad skates and joined The Blacksnake Roller Girls – St. Joseph's first organized roller derby league. As her weekly practice at the National Guard Armory began, I could see her spirits lift and her energy rise. It was obvious she was thrilled to be skating. Being in derby has helped her become a stronger person socially and physically.

Muckenthaler is a 26-year-old, full-time student, who started skating at a young age. "I kind of grew up skating," she told me. "My grandpa used to work for Quaker Oats and they had Christmas parties every year out at the local skating rink." Despite spending so much time on wheels, she was not familiar with roller derby until a couple of years ago, when she saw Whip It, a fictional film about a young woman being introduced into the world of derby. Muckenthaler was overjoyed to realize that this activity she loved so much could also be a competitive sport. She immediately began fantasizing about being a derby player and having a catchy, clever name of her choosing. Due to a lack of organized activity in her immediate area, she wasn't able to try out for derby for a while. When a league was eventually created in town, she jumped at the chance of joining.

Early in her pursuit of joining the league, she learned the significance of choosing a derby name. "A derby player's name is kind of a big deal. Aside from skating, which is an obvious selling point, many people develop an interest in derby because of the unique names," Muckenthaler commented. Players are allowed to fashion a creative and clever moniker to put on their uniforms. Muckenthaler chose the name Aeris Throttle – a play on words for Aristotle, which combines her appreciation for philosophy and her "need for speed." She explained that having the ability to choose a name opens up the option of becoming someone different, an alter-ego that makes it easier to step out of one's boundaries. Muckenthaler elaborates, "I'm a shy... very nice person by nature. I tend to avoid confrontation. But in derby, you can't be like that – you're giving hits and taking hits, and you have to be tough. There's not much room for 'nice' on the track." Muckenthaler starts giggling as she goes on to say, "It's kind of like the movie, Over the Top, when [Sylvester Stallone] flips his hat around. It's the switch. He says he becomes like a machine when he does it. When I put on my skates, I know it's time to get serious. You have to have confidence and you have to believe that you're a badass, so you want to come up with a name that makes you feel empowered and ready to play. You have to be able to flip that switch that takes you from passive to aggressive."

Before players may choose a moniker, they must pass a skills test and afterward submit their hopeful name to a registry to be determined legitimate. "I know for me it's exciting because registering your derby name means that you're good enough to be in derby – you're not just hoping you'll be good enough anymore; you've proved to yourself that you are ca-

pable, and now you can really be part of the team," Muckenthaler explains. "It's like this rite of passage. Once you choose your derby name, your teammates know you by this name, and it strengthens the bond as you become more embedded in the group."

Joining roller derby has helped Muckenthaler meet many new people. "There's a tendency for derby girls to be stereotyped as deviant," she states, "but the reality of it is there are all kinds of different girls from all kinds of different backgrounds, who all share this passion." She mentions that her teammates come from multiple work fields, including social work and hospitals. "I don't think I've ever been involved in something where there is this immediate sense of camaraderie. Everybody is so accepting and so excited. Everyone is so different but it doesn't matter." With no prior derby experience, Muckenthaler was unsure if she would be good enough to make the team. She was surprised by how encouraging and supportive the other women were.

Although dangerous and excessively harmful maneuvers such as any use of elbows or tripping are illegal, players can get pretty aggressive when blocking at such high speeds. "People definitely get hurt," says Muckenthaler. "Not everyone can do it. You have to be tough and you have to be willing to put in the time and the effort and work your butt off for it." Muckenthaler has taken countless bumps and bruises and has seen many of her fellow derby-mates suffer injuries from practice alone. Because of this, a majority of derby training is focused on learning how to fall safely. Falling is inevitable in this sport so it's imperative that players learn how to soften the blow in the safest way possible. Skating pads are required for knees and el-

bows, as well as helmets, but padding only goes so far. When a player falls down in derby, it's crucial that they get back up as quickly as possible. With so many other players moving at such high speeds, it's very easy for a single player's mistake to quickly cause a scene resembling a train wreck or a multi-car pile-up. Learning the different types of falls and slides especially intimidated Muckenthaler at first. "We're constantly being told we have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Instinctively, you want to resist falling down, but the reality is that you will fall... a lot. You have to accept this and overcome your fear of falling, as well as your fear of embarrassment. The great thing about derby is that you become more resilient and you can apply what you learn to many aspects of life." Since she began her journey into the world of derby, Muckenthaler has learned the importance of maintaining a healthy diet and exercising outside of practice. "I've definitely noticed a difference when eating things that are healthy versus things that are unhealthy because of how physically demanding practices are. If I haven't been eating well, then I don't do as well at practice." Among the more strenuous tasks during practice are those that focus on endurance. The players often skate 20 laps in under 5 minutes, or seamlessly switch between sprinting, pushups, and sit-ups for a consecutive 10 minutes, or even practice falls continuously until they cannot get back up. At one time, a single player pushed a train of 9 other players with nothing but her own strength, all while wearing skates. Then she skated to the front of the line and proceeded to pull all nine players with them clinging to her hips. Each skater then followed suit pushing and pulling the weight of their teammates. Exercises like

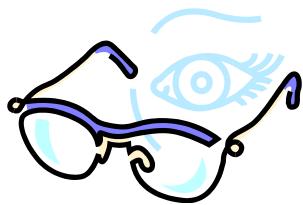
these emphasize teamwork, and that a team is only as strong as its weakest link. Each player has to hold themselves and each other accountable and strive to be better, faster, and stronger with each passing week.

Muckenthaler's ambition and determination in derby has influenced me to explore activities that will keep me active and healthy. She has influenced me to be more physical every day, and I've recently started playing racquetball and jogging. She even persuaded me to go roller skating for the first time in my life. I still don't know how she managed to do this, as I was extremely uncomfortable with the idea of a tall, lanky, accident-prone individual like myself moving at high speeds with small wheels attached to my feet. Despite slightly injuring myself, I'm very proud of how well I did on my first time. When I fell down, she reminded me that she has fallen hundreds of times and that I just need to keep picking myself up and trying again. She reminded me that "waiting and worrying for the inevitable fall is often times much worse than the fall itself." Skating requires endurance, discipline, and patience. Just like Tanya Muckenthaler, I have found all of these qualities within myself, as well as a greater personal confidence through skating.

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Nerds Prevail

Matthew Bibb



In his essay "America Needs Its Nerds," Leonid Fridman speaks out against what he refers to as "anti-intellectual values" in American society. "There is something very wrong with the system of values in a society that only has derogatory terms like nerd and geek for the intellectually curious and academically serious" (257). At first, I couldn't have agreed more. I hated growing up in a society that valued conformity over intellect. Hated it so much, in fact, that it took me quite a while to realize that, thankfully, those times have passed me by. I also puzzled over the notion of "geek" and "nerd" being solely derogatory terms. Since when? Then, I happened to notice the copyright date on Fridman's essay: 1990. My, how we've grown since then.

Back in 1990, I would have been in the early years of grade school, probably second or third grade. By that time, I was almost certainly learning that it was not socially acceptable to be overly brainy. One instance still stands out for me. For whatever reason, I found myself in a lunch table argument about whether or not it was possible to subtract four from two. While I doggedly defended the concept of the negative number, I was all but drowning in a cacophony of my classmates' basic stock response ("You're stupid!") when I introduced a concept that was over their heads; I still shake my head at the irony. .

. Perhaps most ridiculous was the fact that our teacher at the time sided with *them*, stating that the logical thing to do was to assume a mistake was made, subtract two from four, and be done with it. In retrospect, I'm surprised I made it through grade school without being burned at the stake. I have since been vindicated; as anyone who has overdrawn their checking account can attest, negative numbers do, in fact, exist, and as it turns out, they're pretty damn important.

Fridman's work posits that young intellectuals in American society "are deprived of a chance to learn adequate social skills and acquire good communication tools" (257). The passage of twenty-two years has allowed a shocking reversal to ensue. What happened? In short, the nerds prevailed. In 1990, the internet was in its bare infancy. Once it started to blossom, however, nerds the world over could suddenly communicate and network in a way that was scarcely imaginable a decade before. Deprived of opportunities for what was considered "normal" social development, we created our own. Then, in a particularly masterful stroke, we deftly knitted the playground that was the internet into the backbone of American society. In just two short decades, the popular concept of the nerd has gone from a bespectacled weakling worthy only of derision to something on par with the oracle of Delphi; mysterious and essential, somewhat removed, but also respected. America does need her nerds, and now she knows it. Information technology drives the American lifestyle twenty-four hours a day.

Unfortunately, two scant decades have proven insufficient in remediating all aspects of America's anti-intellectual culture. Fridman noted, for example, the disparity between the salaries and social sta-

tus of sports professionals and educators (257), a trend which continues today. Teachers in America today are underpaid and undervalued, while athletic icons can easily pull down a seven figure salary and command the respect and admiration of tens of millions. Clearly, the prospect of one's favorite team winning the Super Bowl is vastly more significant to the average American than the next breakthrough in cancer treatment. As a culture, we've allowed ourselves to become consumed by the desire for instant gratification; a small measure of simple excitement in immediacy is valued far beyond the bleeding-edge research being conducted in quantum computing, for example.

However, the current arrangement, while imbalanced when taken at face value, is not entirely detrimental to America's intellectual elite. Today's typical nerd cares little for the limelight that drives the professional athlete; recognition from one's peers is vastly preferred. At least some of the money that Americans blindly pour into entertainment comes back to academia in the form of grants and scholarships, and if a star quarterback is looking for a tax write-off, he can always generously donate the latest scientific gadgetry to his alma mater's physics department. Thus, though in indirect fashion, Americans will continue to finance the ever-growing (if somewhat underappreciated,) intellectual infrastructure that binds our nation together.

Fridman questions whether America can maintain her prestigious world-standing while relying on the brain-trusts of nations abroad rather than fostering a society more accepting of intellectualism here at home (258). Since pointing at two decades of success and scientific advancement in response to Fridman's work

is starting to feel a little cheap, I'd like to point out what is, in my opinion, a fundamental flaw in his reasoning. To say that "America needs its nerds" is indicative of a somewhat narrow world-view. These issues concern nothing less than the sum total of humanity, not just one nation. Advances and breakthroughs are often made by collaborations of many countries and cultures working together towards a common goal. As the scientific pursuits of the world become more grandiose, the abilities and inclinations of any one nation to foot the bill, in terms of both monetary and intellectual expense, diminish proportionately. Above and beyond the dangers of shunning and deriding our nerds, America cannot afford the isolationism that has defined it in the past. While America might well remain a bastion of liberty in the world, it would be foolish and counterproductive to try to stand on our own in the arena of scientific advancement.

Fridman further asserts, "If we are to succeed as a society in the 21st century, we had better shed our anti-intellectualism and imbue in our children the vision that a good life is impossible without stretching one's mind and pursuing knowledge to the full extent of one's abilities"(258). Once again, I find myself in disagreement. In addition to the problems inherent in such nebulous concepts as "a good life" and "the full extent of one's abilities," individuals should be encouraged to pursue their passions, rather than their aptitudes. Ideally, the two should coincide, but that is not often the case in real-world scenarios. While natural abilities and talents are often the deciding factors in individual success, genuine interest and love of a particular subject or practice can be just as potent. In short, academia might not satisfy the

personal desires of an individual, even if they are intellectually inclined. If a person is not happy with the path their life has taken, how can that life be said to be "good", no matter what standards of success one might choose to apply?

In spite of the timespan separating Fridman's essay from the current state of affairs, his views and concerns remain valid, if for no better reason than the fact that those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. We may have dodged the specific bullet that Fridman anticipated, but we must be ever mindful of the risk of slipping back into old habits. Our current trend of intellectual advancement far outshines the grim vision of the future laid out in "America Needs Its Nerds", but we cannot afford complacency in the matter. Fortunately, the thirst for knowledge is difficult to quench. Considering the marvels that a mere twenty years have wrought, as well as the less-than-favorable climate they were able to rise from, I am more than confident that intellectualism in America will continue to thrive and flourish.

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Reading Stinks, but Writing Can Be Fun

Natasha Boles



I love reading! I always have a book in my hands! These are sentences that have never been spoken out of my mouth. I have never enjoyed reading and have found it quite difficult to understand. I was the student in school that always read at a lower level than I was in. It was not until I was in seventh grade that I found a love for writing. I started writing fictional stories about what I daydreamed about. They were great children stories at the time. I still could not understand reading though. The first book that I ever read from cover to cover was *Twilight* when I was an adult. For some reason I felt a connection to the book and loved how it focused on one group of characters and did not jump around a lot. Now even though I love writing I am still not interested in reading. I find reading to be a lot of work similar to what Richard Rodriguez states in, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," but I have always had a great love for writing my own stories.

Reading has always been difficult for me. It has never been my strong subject. I was always confused when teachers would explain books as being your friends. In his essay "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," Richard Rodriguez advocates that books are not everyone's friends and that reading can be a chore to many. For example Rodriguez says,

"Friends? Reading was, at best, only a chore" (294). In other words, many people including Rodriguez do not understand the point in reading because they found it difficult to understand what they were reading. I agree with Rodriguez that people find reading a chore because I am one of those people who find reading difficult. In one instance, I remember being told by several of my teachers growing up that I was unable to read at the same level as many other students in my class. Being told I was not as smart as my fellow classmates really hurt and made me feel extremely stupid.

Growing up and feeling like a failure in reading was hard for me. I never understood why I never understood what I was reading or not be able to focus on the books. I was always the girl that loved to hear stories, but for whatever reason I just felt alone when trying to read a book. Richard Rodriguez shows in his essay that he had the same issues of reading alone. For example Rodriguez says, "One day the nun concluded a session by asking me why I was so reluctant to read by myself. I tried to explain; said something about the way written words made me feel alone---almost, I wanted to add but didn't, as when I spoke to myself in a room just emptied of furniture" (294). In other words, Rodriguez believed as a young child that being forced to read by himself made him feel lonely, just like reading by myself made me feel lonely. I agree with Rodriguez that some students feel alone while reading. There are many students that struggle with reading, but never talk to anyone about it. For instance, I have always kept my fear of reading hidden and I was never strong enough to ask for help. Reading can be a challenge kept secret from many people.

However, I found an amazing love for writing at a young age despite my fear of writing. The very first writing assignment I remember having was when I was in the seventh grade. My teacher assigned all the students to write and illustrate a children's book. I wrote a fictional children's story about a girl and her two big sisters. This book was so much fun to write that I continued writing the children's books. All the stories went along with one another. One day my teacher asked me if I would allow her to put the story up in the school district office for others to read. I felt like Russell Baker in his essay "Learning to Write," in which Baker talks about being praised by his teacher for a writing assignment in which his teacher praised and read aloud to the class. Baker states, "I did my best to avoid showing pleasure, but what I was feeling was pure ecstasy at this startling demonstration that my words had the power to make people laugh" (269). In other words, Baker was proud and felt he had accomplished something in that class. I agree with Baker that being praised by a teacher for a job well done is ultimate ecstasy because it shows the teacher and classmates that the goal was accomplished with great honor. I will always remember my teacher asking me if she could display my work. I felt, as if, I had accomplished a much bigger goal than just completing the assignment.

With my big accomplishment in the seventh grade, I discovered a great love and passion for writing much more mature stories. I started writing a chapter book shortly after graduating high school. I had great love for the fact that I had no guidelines that needed to be followed. I was able to write from my heart. Baker talks about writing his essay for his class

and it being a mistake that had to be turned in because he had no other option. Baker says, "Suddenly I wanted to write about that, about the warmth and good feeling of it, but I wanted to put it down simply for my own joy, not for Mr. Fleagle" (268). In other words, Baker found great joy in writing something that was interesting to him and did not care about what his teacher might say. I agree with Baker that sometimes having a passion to write about something that might disappoint the reader because writing with passion is the best thing a person can do. Writing with passion, will make the writing better and much more entertaining. For instance, I love writing about topics that I love to write about. I prefer not to have guidelines on what I write about. I like to write about what is in my soul. Writing should never be something forced upon somebody, but instead guide the writer in the right direction.

Writing is something I enjoy to do, but reading is much more difficult for me to understand. From reading both essays, "The Lonely, Good Company of Books," by Richard Rodriguez and "Learning to Write," by Russell Baker, I can relate to both authors about reading and writing. Reading is a chore sprung upon students, but never explained perfectly. Many students will graduate high school and still not understand reading and will suffer through adult life because of that. Other students will graduate with a great love and passion for writing their own stories. We as a society need to be helping students accomplish having a love and passion for both. I only wish I had a passion and understanding for reading because being better at reading would greatly increase my writing skills. I will continue writing and only hope that becoming more

interested in reading will come along sometime later in my life.

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From Child to Woman

Corissa Collins



Being an insubordinate child, challenged me to be an independent woman in order for me to achieve success. From a very young age I had always been ornery. I was always going where I shouldn't, doing what I shouldn't and worst of all I always seemed to get a thrill from it. Being insubordinate, rejecting authority was a game I loved to play. I would stay out for 5 minutes after I heard my mom yell for me, I would ride my bike a little further than I was supposed to and I enjoyed doing these mischievous things just to see if I could get away with it, and most of the time I did.

When I got older I had a new set of rules along with a new set of consequences. I had achieved another level of my game. Again I did everything that I was not supposed to. I would do bad things at school and lie my way out of it. At school it was even easier than at home. At school I made ideal grades and I was one of the very few who were known to be religious. I did not look the part of a problem child, especially in my community. Eventually though, it came out and my parents were notified of my behavior. Usually that just meant trouble at home, but my parents chose to inform my school of my all around bad behavior and said they would try to punish me at home but the more I

got caught the smarter I got. By the time I reached my teen years, my parents could not control me anymore. I remember a specific incident where I stole our family ATV and drove it to a neighboring town. I didn't have big plans for the night but I wanted to do something I knew I shouldn't have. Shortly after I left that night my mother woke to find me gone. Of course like every other mother, mine called the police, and I was arrested for the first time at just 14. I was ruled as an "out of control teen" in a court room and I served 2 years probation. During that time I would lie about where I was and what I was doing when they had no way of knowing. At some point they became tired of worrying what terrible things I would do while they were responsible for me so they sent me out into the big huge world when I was just 16 years old. I didn't have any money, a car, a job, or a place to stay. My stubborn attitude did not fail me here. At that moment I made a choice that I would acquire all of the things that I needed, alone. The challenge that I faced was one far beyond anything that my little mind had perceived. I had to figure these things out all at once, which was hard but it gave me an idea of what I was going to have to do in order to survive.

Not long after turning 17 I landed myself in jail a few times, for overnight stays. I thought that I was invincible to authority. I did a lot of drinking and drugs around that time period, which was usually the reason I was going to jail. The whole place was scary to me, not because it was full of criminals but because I was scared that I would be one of those criminals one day, sitting my life away in a cell because I didn't have the guts to face my life and take charge of it. I used drugs as a crutch before this time, I did them be-

cause I had to deal with my “hard life” but in reality they were making my life hard. I had a great deal of fear for my future if I kept going in this direction. Like Richard Rodriguez mentions in his essay, I also saw “critical figures in my memory”, (pg. 171), reminders of where and what I came from. In an environment like jail, pictures of my family and childhood would run back and forth across my mind the whole time. Mostly I would wonder how I got myself into such a place, so far away from brothers and sisters, birthdays and holidays, love and compassion. I remembered being young at our family gatherings and how everybody was always so proud of me, I had straight A’s in school and I always tried to one up myself just so I could brag about my accomplishments. And then a light bulb went on in my head and I realized that the more important issue was how I was going to change this reoccurring pattern once I left jail. In the past I had never succeeded at doing this because I tried to do everything at once and when it wasn’t successful the first try I would become discouraged. This always seemed to slow down the progress I had in mind, I would make questionable decisions, such as going to parties, getting drunk, and smoking marijuana. In turn these actions would get me into more trouble or make me feel as if I wasn’t capable of what I was trying to accomplish.

My dad had always told me being insane meant trying the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. That in mind I felt a little insane, and I knew in order to get a different result I was going to need new ideas. I would make lists all day and night about what I needed to get done and places I needed to go. With a new form of organization in my life I was making admirable changes. If in

one day I could finish the tasks on my list I felt that I had accomplished a goal. Finally feeling a sense of accomplishment, I had enough self-esteem to get me anywhere I wanted to go. A day at a time, and months later I had accomplished a high school diploma, full time employment, a steady home, and I also began attending Missouri Western State University.

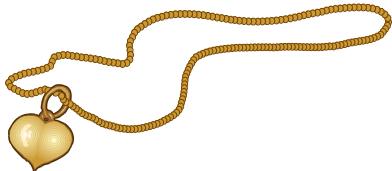
As I became more independent, I realized what values had inspired my direction of accomplishment. My parents were always telling me as a child that I could achieve anything that I wanted, that I was smart enough to be whatever I wanted, and that I was going to be a stronger person if I took the hard road to figure all of that out. James Baldwin says in his essay, “all of my father’s texts and songs, which I had decided were meaningless, were arranged before me at his death like empty bottles, waiting to hold the meaning which life would them for me”, (pg. 121). Now in case my father is not dead, but this quote holds a significant meaning for me because my adopted father had raised me in a respectable way with strong values and morals and as an early teen until just recently I had written him off. At the time I was completely unaware as to what kind of significance those words of wisdom were going to hold up to in my life.

In choosing to be insubordinate, I unconsciously made the decision to be independent as well, though some people would disagree with that saying there are many cases of children, teens, and adults who act out and are far from independent. That is true, in my case though I had a strong set of moral principles instilled by my family and community as a child that were not going to allow me to fail, by making the choice to be successful at a

very young age I had already done half the work for my future. Now looking back I cannot say that I am in particular proud by any means of the things I have done, but stronger, wiser, and bolder are all words that come to mind when I look back to life changing decisions I made, good or bad.

My Golden Locket: A Window to the Past

Spencer Darnall



It has dangled from my neck since the moment I unwrapped it from its Christmas inspired box. Its golden shimmer catches my eye every time I look down, and its beautiful designs capture the interest of others. They ask me what's inside, and find it sweet when I tell them, "My Granddaddy." I have not gone a single day without it hanging right next to my heart. My locket is my most prized possession because it represents the connection of three generations, it keeps the memories of my grandpa alive, and it is beautiful and can always be carried close to my heart. I'll never forget the first time I clasped it around my neck.

I woke from a deep sleep, rubbed the sleep dust from my eyes and opened the curtain to peer outside. The sun was just beginning to appear over the horizon and frost glistened on the snowless ground. I was about to pull the covers back over my head when it dawned on me; it was Christmas. I climbed out of bed, brushed my bed head in a bun, and trotted upstairs with my favorite blanket wrapped around my shoulders to keep the morning chill away. My parents were up and making breakfast; "Merry Christmas," they sang. I cuddled on the couch and looked at the flood of presents surrounding our tree, most of them with my name on it.

Once my brother finally toddled from bed, we scarfed down syrupy pancakes, scrambled eggs, crispy bacon, and warm biscuits and started in on the presents. One at a time we opened present after present until our living room was a mess of shiny paper, torn boxes, and piles of new things. I sat back to admire my gifts and the happy smiles of my family, not knowing I had one more surprise. My mom brought out a small, rectangular box; being a girl I knew this had to be jewelry. I carefully tore the crisp paper and opened the Kay's box to find a gold, oval locket. It was simply beautiful with its engraved swirls and raised bronze and green leaves. I eased it open; it held a photo of my grandpa wearing his favorite denim button-up shirt, in his shirt pocket his tea cup Yorkie poked his head out. The photo had sat next to his bedside when he had passed, just a few months earlier.

I loved it; I hugged my mom tight while tears fell from my eyes. "Now you can always carry his memories right next to your heart," my mom advised. I clasped it around my neck and couldn't take my eyes off of it. What makes it even more special is that it was given to me by my mom. It connects the three of us in the most beautiful way. When I look at it I remember my Granddaddy and thank my mom for giving me this gorgeous treasure filled with memories. Looking at the photo now I remember that awful day.

My mom trotted into the room, courageous and determined, took his hand, and began to talk. He looked at her, mouth open and ready to speak, but no words escaped. After years of growing frustration, he finally seemed at peace. He knew who we were; I could tell by the weak smile and the determination to try

and speak to us, but there was just not enough strength left. I took a deep breath; who was this man? His body sank into itself; there was no fat, no muscle, just skin hiding bones that threatened to puncture through. His face remained familiar, wrinkled and pale, but still freckled and blue-eyed. I took his hand, still gigantic in mine, and struggled for words. I was shocked by this 6'4" skeleton before me. My once tall and strong hero now lay in bed unable to care for himself. He was once opinionated and outspoken, but now could only mutter a whispery sound of unheard words.

September 20, 2011 my granddaddy took his last breath while my mom held his hand and begged him not to leave us yet, but he had held on so long and could no longer fight it. He followed the sunshine to a place where he no longer struggled to remember, but could be strong and young once more. Although that day will always bring tears to my eyes, it also brings happiness to my heart because I know he is healthy and strong again and I will always have the sweet memories of him before his illness took over.

I'll always remember the plane rides to Florida, trading home in California for the warmth of his arms. He took us fishing on the river and pried blue crabs from the bottom of his pool so we could swim. He never yelled when we slid down the hallway in our socks and ran wild at the thought of walking down to the beach for a morning swim. My granddaddy loved to cook; every morning he would cook enough pancakes for a whole army, plus eggs, hash browns, bacon, and everything in-between. I'll never forget sitting in his lap and tracing the hundreds of freckles on his head. I could never thank him enough for giving me his crooked, thin

smile and those same shining eyes. Every teary-eyed, laughter-filled memory is safely hidden in my golden locket.

My mom turned my memories into a tangible piece of beauty. When I move it quietly swings and thuds against my chest; it glistens when the light catches it, and I can easily see my grandpa's face when I miss him. Just like his eyes and smile will always be seen on me, so will his memories. I can look in the mirror and see him in me; I share his smile, his big eyes, and his love of cooking. Now I can look at my locket as well and see him framed in gold and protected by a shiny, transparent cover.

It is a rare occasion that anyone will see me without my locket on, because a day without it means a day without my granddaddy by my side. Having it with me everyday gives me that connection to not only him but also with my mom; it triggers the memories I have of him, and it also gives me something beautiful to wear around my neck.

Musical Fortress

Zach Defoe



Have you ever turned on the radio and heard a song that took you back to a certain place or time? Music is all around us no matter where we are. Whatever we are doing, it is there. Music is my sanctuary and my passion, and the way I get there is my guitar. My guitar is a Gibson Les Paul Studio Custom that is stained red like a rose. Clad with black Zakk Wylde EMG humbuckers, a mahogany fret board, and gold hardware, it is a mirror of me. It is my portal to self expression and solace. It is my focus and faithful friend. It sets me free.

I have chosen my guitar to be my most significant item because, simply; it is a part of me. After years of playing it, my guitar has become a literal extension of my arm and body. I have become so accustom to its weight and position that when I find myself without it, I feel that I am missing something. It is my heart. I play rhythm and it keeps me aware of the vitality of life. It is my soul. It provides one way I can always find beauty. Every emotion or feeling I have can be transcribed onto it. I believe music is the language of the heart and soul. Without my guitar, I would be distant from this reality and silent.

A guitar's ability to manipulate and express emotions is out of this world. This makes my guitar very important to me, and confirms who I am by allowing

me to say what I need to say. Without it I would be a mess and have no way to express my feelings. Some people read books or even listen to music to take them away from the "here and now". I found writing music with my guitar gives me that natural high while at the same time grounds and validates my feelings. When I'm sad and feeling lost, I can pick up my guitar and find peace. My guitar helps me through thick or thin! It's my outlet and my comfort.

Through out school I was a football player and I loved every moment of it. Like my father, I was born with the ability to get back up no matter how hard I got hit. That is, until one faithful day when football was taken from me in a car crash. I fractured my neck and suffered extreme whiplash. Knowing that I would never play a contact sport again, I had to find something else to concentrate on and grow my gifts doing. That something else was the guitar. I had always wanted to learn to play. As soon as I did, I fell in love with it. From that point on, it was not hard to decide on what I would focus my life path on. I started making bands and jamming with tons of people. Every new chord or ability I learned got me closer to my goal! I was hooked. Every chance that I had, I played my guitar. Finding new ways to play it was my fix. Thriving for more knowledge and feeding off of every riff I wrote kept me going. There are times when I hit a writer's block; but like a poet whose emotions are on high, the music flows from my head straight to my strings. Thanks to my guitar and voice, I now make a living showing my abilities as a lead singer and guitar player for one of the biggest bands in Kansas City Missouri. My stories, my emotions, and my life are heard from my guitar. People hear my songs and connect

with them because we all have shared experiences and feelings. Music tears down walls that we put up. Waking Jericho, the name of my band, exemplifies that. Music has the power to heal, console, validate, and allow us to really live.

My guitar is my most faithful friend. I really found that out just recently. In the last few months, my life was turned upside down. I felt as if I was swallowed in darkness. My fiance left me after three years of being together because she found someone new. I was reeling and trying to find something to hold on to; something faithful. Having also lost my job, due to my move up to Saint Joseph to continue school, I was also feeling financially unstable and extremely anxious. I moved in with an old friend only to find myself and him imminently homeless. Nothing about my life was working out but I continued to pray and hope everything would eventually get better. I was lost with nowhere to turn and nowhere to run. Life was literally banging on my very temporary door step. My new reality seemed a nightmare. I picked up my guitar looked at it and smiled for the first time in what seems like forever. I started getting familiar with the feel of it. I was cooled and relaxed by the cold stained wood underneath my arm. The tight strings were lifeless and the pick in my hand felt heavy. I started plucking around on it, getting it warmed up. For a moment my pain disappeared. I cried, laughed, smiled, and felt my soul coming alive. The more I played my guitar, the less darkness I felt. Then, always faithful, a song came into my head and I started to play it. It was simple yet powerful. My tears stopped falling and my pain went away. It was nowhere to be found. It is my comfort and it is forever faithful.

Life is complicated sometimes and things might happen that you don't want to happen. But life is also an amazing journey if you have your passions. I know no matter how bad something turns out, no matter how defeated I feel, I will have my guitar by my side and I will be free. In 2004, my grandpa Jack died after losing his battle with cancer. Before he died, he came to my first ever concert holding up a "Zach's # 1 Fan" sign. He told me to hold on to my passion and my guitar because whether or not I knew it, it would always be an essential tool to let my soul ring out and be free. I promised him I would never give up. So every time I play a song, I look up for a moment and smile. I know he was right.

My guitar is not just an object. It is who I am and the best way to get to know me. Even though we look banged up or rough around the edges, we are and can make something beautiful. I know very little of this world, but what I do know is; music knows me. Life is dull and unfulfilling if we do not find our muse. I am Zachary Michael DeFoe and my Gibson Les Paul Studio Custom stained red like a rose, with black Zakk Wylde EMG humbuckers, and a mahogany fret board writes the story of my life. It reminds me I am human, I bleed red like the rest, but my heart, like the hardware, is plated with gold and that is what makes me unique.

A Savior Made From Alder Wood

Robert Tyler Evilla



As my hands work their way past each string, the mood shifts from dark to light. For most musicians this feeling is quite common. When I look back to my days before I picked up music I find myself in shock. I remember being 14 years old struggling to make friends and always feeling as though I couldn't do anything right. It was my passion for music that brought me into the man I am today. What's more important, is the story I've shared with my guitar. The acoustic guitar that started my days as a musician led me and many others in a new direction of passion, friendship and acceptance.

The day I got an unexpected package in the mail was the day I held my guitar for the first time. Ron Utley, a family friend, sent it to me with a note saying, "I hope this guitar will bring you as much happiness as my daughter, use it well". As I opened the case to reveal a golden-brown body and copper strings with the smooth feel of alder wood, I knew this guitar was right for me. Since my musical abilities were nonexistent, my first notes on the new guitar were anything but soft. I had never given music a second thought, but now that I was given this gift I thought it was worth a shot. I instantly called Music Central, a local music store

that offered guitar lessons, to make an appointment with the instructor, L.J. He set me up to come in every Tuesday from 5:00pm till 7:30pm. I had just taken my first steps as a musician and my new guitar was the cornerstone of it.

My new hobby was bringing me to new levels of happiness I had never felt. Hours I used to spend every day being bored were now being spent playing my guitar and counting the seconds until my next class with L.J. After months of practice the notes on the paper that once looked like a foreign language started to make sense. I was finally starting to make real music which was now becoming my passion. In the past I always felt that I wasn't meant to be good at anything. I lacked talent and passion my whole life, but then having the ability to say I had both brought me further up than anything in my life to that point. Outside the boost in self-esteem, my guitar would soon open doors to friendship I hadn't seen coming.

On a summer afternoon while I was practicing in the field of Mesick Park, my guitar brought me the next great gift, a friend. Megan Allen approached me in awe of my music. Like me, Megan was a musician with the guitar being her primary instrument. We quickly hit it off and soon were inseparable. We would play our guitars together helping the other become a better musician, making us even closer as friends. Playing my guitar had been my favorite pass-time, but playing it with a friend made it even better. Though I had many friends in my life, I had never found it safe to call anyone my best friend. Over time, however I finally found it safe to say this girl that my guitar attracted to me was my best friend.

Megan and I being best friends gave us an additional set of ears that

would listen. We shared a common problem of two dark pasts consisting of deaths in our families, abandonment, and discrimination from school. Neither one of us had a best friend nor was close enough to our families to help deal with the emotions or stress in a teenagers life. As Megan and I opened up to each other and always knowing someone cared, we slowly came to peace with our haunting pasts. In a way it was my guitar that brought me to let go of the demons that were haunting not only my life, but Megan's as well. I knew my guitar was changing my life for the better. What I didn't know was that there were others that were changed before me.

After four years of my guitar reshaping my life I finally had the chance to thank the man responsible for all of it. I called Ron to thank him for the guitar, and explained to him just how much it changed me. He cut me off instantaneously and told me it was me he needed to thank. Ron cleared his throat and opened up of his daughter, Michelina Combs. Born and raised in a family of musicians, Michelina inherited her father's guitar at the age of ten. For the next five years she fueled her talent performing at nursing homes, in school talent shows and to all other ears that would listen. Her love for music gave her life meaning and excitement. Though she lacked passion from her peers she made up for it with her passion for music. When a drunk driver collided with a vehicle she was riding in, Michelina's life and music was taken away from the world at her young age of 15. Out of grief her guitar and other belongings were put into storage away from family eyes. The guitar laid there for two years collecting dust, until it came to me, thus beginning my journey with the sentimental instrument. Ron's second chance

to pass the family guitar down he said "filled the childless void that haunted him since Michelina's death". After years of thinking my guitar was only meant to save me, in reality it saved both Ron and Michelina's memory.

It's as though my guitar had a power within it to enhance the lives of all who came into contact with it. It saved me from a sad adolescent to become the happy man I thought I'd never become. Without my guitar I would've never found Megan and Megan never would've found me. The Combs family played that guitar for two generations giving Michelina something to call her passion during her short unfair life. Even Ron was saved when he was able to pass the guitar to me, giving him a second chance to change someone's life with his family heirloom. As my hands work their ways through the strings of my savior made from alder wood, more of life's greatest gifts are granted through the powerful gift of music.

The Cycle

Tonya Frazee



Does your lifestyle, background, race, income status, etc., determine who you will become? If you come from a poor family and your parents do drugs, does that mean that you're going to grow up to be poor and do drugs? Can that cycle be broken? I believe that some people do repeat the cycle, but it depends on their supporters and what kind of motivation they have and the desire to want to break that cycle. The book *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, supports my belief that it depends on each individual, and what kind of support and motivation that a person might have in their life. Wes #1, the author of the book, and Wes #2 both came from the same place, same background, poor, and hung around troubled peers and drug dealers, but they became two separate people. Wes #1 had support from family and friends and eventually had the motivation to become someone great, where Wes #2 had some of the same opportunities but chose to not take advantage of them. He chose life on the streets and crime. I didn't always have the support or motivation that I have now. I used to just float through life with not a care in the world. There were things I wanted to do, like go back to school but without the support, I had no motivation to do it. The support we give our loved

ones throughout their life will motivate them to want to do well and succeed in life.

As with Wes #1, Wes #2, and myself, family and friends are our biggest supporters. You just have to listen and follow the advice that they are giving you. Teachers, counselors, and people with authority, like cops for instance, are also persons we should listen to and take advice from. Wes #2 had some support from his older brother Tony but chose not to listen to his brother's warnings and advice about staying in school. Tony says to Wes, "Yo, you need to take this shit seriously, man. Acting stupid ain't cool!" (Moore 27). All Wes got out of this was blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. He had heard it so much from his brother that he eventually started to ignore his warnings and concerns. He saw them as "tirades", "do as I say, not as I do" (Moore 27). I think Wes saw the power and respect that his older brother got on the streets and he wanted to follow in Tony's footsteps. When Tony finds out that Wes is dealing in drugs he gets angry and says to Wes, "Dude, I'm only going to ask you one more time. Where did you get the money from?" (Moore 69). Tony who has been dealing in drugs for a decade knew when Wes told him the story about getting the money from DJing that it was a lie and Tony lost it. Tony drew back and punched Wes dead in the face, Wes fell to the ground and Tony pinned him down demanding again for him to tell him the truth. Their mother comes out and breaks up the fight and Tony eventually says to Wes, "If you won't listen, that's on you. You have potential to do so much more, go so much further. You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink, right?" (Moore 71-72). Tony was telling Wes that he's tired of trying to

steer him in the right direction, because he isn't going to listen anyway. Wes #1 at first didn't listen to the advice his mother and grandparents gave him and he started to head down the same path. Skipping school, running the streets, and vandalizing property that he would spray paint his nickname, "KK", with a circle around it on walls. After getting caught by the cops vandalizing a wall, it scared him. The cop gave Wes a second chance saying to him, "You kids are way too young to be in this situation. But you know what, I see kids like you every day. If you don't get smart, I am certain I will see you again. That's the sad part." (Moore 83). Wes says, "I became aware of how I put myself in this unimaginable dire situation-this man now had control of my body; even my own hands had become useless to me...All I wanted to do was to turn around, go home, and never find myself at this precipice again for such a stupid reason. Kid Kupid! What was I thinking?" (Moore 83-84). Before the cop let Wes go he whispers in his ear, "I hope you really listen to what I told you." (Moore 84). Even though this scared Wes, he was back to doing the vandalizing a week later. However, he would eventually understand what the cop meant and respect their authority. When I was reading this and how he felt it reminded me of a time in my teenage years where I snuck out of the house in the middle of the night with a friend of mine. We were not vandalizing anything or causing harm to anyone, but when we got back to her house, the cops were waiting for us. The cops called my parents and then took me home. On the way there, the cops explained to me why it was unsafe for two young teenage girls to be running the streets in the middle of the night. Even though it scared me and I never snuck out of the house again, I did-

n't get in trouble from my parents. I don't know why they never said anything to me about it again, but I wasn't going to ask. Maybe they already knew that the cops had scared me. This was the only time I ever got in trouble with the law. I learned then, that we all have the ability to do the right things and not to make the same mistakes over and over; we just have to want to do the right things. Tony tried to be a supporter in Wes #2's life and Wes #1 and myself had a good experience with the law, and I believe that we took that with us throughout our life. We listened to them and followed their advice.

School is a very important part of who we will become. Some kids need more support when it comes to school and they might need that someone special to give them the motivation to want to succeed. Wes #1's mother knew Wes wasn't stupid and she knew he was capable of learning, he just wasn't trying. She says to him, "You think I'm playing. Just try me." (Moore 76). Even though Wes #1 had support from his mother and grandparents, he didn't have support from his teacher; he says that he and his teacher have a silent agreement, "a don't ask, don't tell" (Moore 77) because the teacher told him it didn't matter to her if he came to school or not. I think that Wes made this ok with himself to not try in school or even go, because he had an adult who could not have cared less if he came to school or not. Not long after that Wes's mother sent him to military school. In his first call home, which came four days after being there and wasn't supposed to call home for a month, he tried to convince his mom to let him come home saying to her, "Ma. I know I haven't been perfect, but I promise to do better. I will pay attention in school and go more often. I will clean my

room, I will clean your room, and I will-” (Moore 95). She cut him off; telling him he wasn’t going anywhere till he gave it a try. In this conversation with his mother Wes realized just what his mother and grandparents “sacrificed” to send him to military school. She says to him, “I love you, and I am proud of you. And, Wes, it’s time to stop running,” (Moore 96). Wes was on the right path now. In three years he went from being a troubled teen to a platoon sergeant, a cadet master, and the youngest noncommissioned officer in the entire corp. Their standard motto, “”No excuses, no exceptions,”” and honor code, “”A cadet will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor tolerate those that do,”” Wes says, “were not simple words we had to memorize but words to live by” (Moore 115). Wes #2 was sometimes going to high school, sometimes not; he was dealing drugs and starting to get into girls. He found out a couple months after meeting his first girlfriend Alicia that they were going to have a baby. This depressed Wes but he wasn’t sure why; he also didn’t feel like being a father at a young age would destroy his future, because he hadn’t even thought about his future plans. Wes didn’t have his father in his life growing up, so I don’t think he even knew what it meant to be a father. If he knew what was expected of him? What role he would need to take in this child’s life? He stopped going to school after the birth of his first born. Wes tried to find a job to support his baby and Alicia but he soon realized that without a high school diploma or job training and with a criminal record, it was impossible. He dropped out of Job Corps; he just kept selling drugs instead of trying to improve his situation. Wes did not value the importance of education and the desire to succeed. I too dropped out of high school, and no

one tried to talk me out of it. I told the Assistant Principal that I was going to drop out and she said to me, “You got to do what you got to do”, and at that point it didn’t bother me. It really bothers me now, because if she had of given me a little encouragement or tried to convince me to stay in school, maybe I would have. My boyfriend at that time thought it was a good idea too for me to drop out of school, he said to me, “You can just go get your GED”. I married him and even though I did go back and get my GED, I wanted to go to college but he wouldn’t have it. My parents didn’t say much; they were upset, but never explained the importance to me or tried to get me to stay in school. Wes #1 eventually saw how important education is. He realizes that with the support of the Cadet Captains and the other people around him in military school that he enjoyed going to school. He says, “They made it clear that they cared if I succeeded, and eventually so did I.” (Moore 115). It showed him if they cared enough that he succeeded, then he started to care too, and wanting to succeed himself. I too now see how an education is important and I know how much further I would have been, I just wish I had stayed in school and went to college back then. I didn’t have the support; so I didn’t have the motivation. I now believe that support and motivation are keys to our success.

Everyone at one time or another will need support and/or motivation in their life. You might have to ask for it, or someone might just notice and take the step to help you, but like I said earlier; you have to listen and follow their advice. Even though I didn’t have the support and motivation when I was in school, I do believe family and friends will not steer you in the wrong direction, neither will

your teachers, or counselors. I'm sure I did have someone back then who was there to support me, I just probably didn't listen. Just like the book, *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, the two Wes's learned the importance of education and what happens if you ignore the people around you who are trying to steer you in the right direction. This goes for anyone; if you have the support, then the rest is in your hands, get the motivation to do great things with your life. Education is very important and valuable to all of us.

Going for the Gold

Summer Howe



As a thirteen year old just starting sports acrobatic gymnastics, I had a dream that someday I would get the chance to stand on top of the podium getting a gold medal put around my neck. By the end of the summer in 2008, I had achieved that goal by winning three National titles in three years. As I began my fourth season, I set for myself a new dream, three goals and several challenges to overcome. I would be training for hours on end, days upon weeks and even months to achieve my aspirations in a sport similar to Cirque Du Soleil. My goals were to win Nationals in my Level 7 pair as well as my Level 8 trio and becoming a two-time member of the Junior Olympic National team. The purpose for the high expectations was to prove to myself I could overcome any obstacles placed before me that season. I learned even with hard work and dedication things may not turn out the way I'd plan but lessons can still be learned.

The excitement and anticipation all started at camp in August. The main objective of camp is to work with different people doing all kinds of new skills so the coaches can determine what partners work best together. In the past, my same trio was always kept together but this year was different. Not only was I getting new partners, I was getting a new position too. The three positions of sports

acro are the top, middle and base. Of those positions, I had always been the top balancing on my base and middle in our balance routine or soaring through the air as they tossed me in our dynamic routine. Now I was being put in the middle position of a new trio. I would be the person to balance on the base while holding our top person or tossing and catching our top while she flies in the air. I also became a base for a pair which is the person who holds the whole trick up. My new partners, Tiffany and Katrina, had been together the previous year, along with a girl who was not returning this season. I knew I had big shoes to fill and hoped I could overcome the difficulties of learning a new position with new partners. I was definitely feeling plenty of weight on my shoulders.

As practices started, I quickly realized how comfortable I was with my new partners and it almost seemed like we had been together for years. We progressed with our stunts at a rapid rate. By October it was time for choreographers to come in to help us create the dance moves to our new three minute routines set to music. The dynamic routine had seven skills with funky and fast music. Quite the opposite of our dynamic was our balance routine, which had three skills and slower dramatic music. The balance routine has fewer stunts in it because each skill takes longer to get into, and it must be held for about three seconds or it's considered a fall. By the end of February 2009 having each routine memorized and each skill mastered, it was finally time for our first meet. We all met at Katrina's house to put our hair up into perfect buns and applying our make-up of smoky glittering eye shadow and red lipstick. After hair and make-up it was time to put on our leotards sparkling

with hundreds of crystals and head to the meet. Shortly after arriving it was time to quickly go through our routine in warm up and then the competition began. Even though none of our stunts fell, both my trio and pair placed second. To some that's success, but to me it wasn't where I wanted to be. My determination became even stronger as my eyes were set on the next meet.

We went back to the gym to work harder and to change some skills for higher difficulty. A skill we added was called basket double back tuck. In this, Tiffany and I throw Katrina as powerfully as we can. When she hits her highest peak she tucks and does two flips in the air before landing on the ground. This is one of the hardest elements a Level 8 trio can perform. Making our routine more challenging must have worked as we placed first at the meet and qualified for State. As State rolled around, all eyes were on us wondering what was going to happen next. Were we going to be able to beat the other competition again? As a matter of fact we did, both my pair and trio became State Champions. I couldn't wait to be back at the gym to increase difficulty once more and polish the routines to increase our chances of getting gold as we moved on to our Regional meet. At

Regionals we not only won but received a special recognition for being most in sync, and I even got my own award by being the most flexible. This gave us more energy and encouragement as Nationals was coming up next.

Nationals began with our dynamic routine which was full of tumbling, high flipping and ultimate twisting. Our adrenaline was flowing as we anxiously waited for the judge to signal for us to start. Before we knew it, we were done and on top of the leader board. The next day was our

balance routine which we felt was the stronger of our two routines. In this routine we had a lot of skills that balanced on top of each other. This is where I felt the most pressure because the difficulty level for my position in the skills we chose was high. The trio before us completed their routine. My mind raced as I mentally went through our routine. "Breathe," I told myself. I searched the crowd looking for my parents. All I wanted was to see their faces for support. I spotted them in the upper stands smiling down at me, mom with her camera and dad with the video camera, all ready to go. I walked over to the edge of the floor with my heart pounding so rapidly I thought it was going to come out of my chest. The announcer introduced us. As we saluted the judges, I almost felt as if I were in a dream. I positioned myself on the floor and waited for the music to begin. It seemed like an eternity as I stood with my arms stretched out and bent over looking down on my partners. The music began and thirty seconds into the routine it was time for our first major skill, "The Sandwich" which is incredibly hard for me. Tiffany took her standing squatted position. I turned with my back to her, place my sweaty hands on her thighs and then kick my legs up as she reaches out and grabs them at my ankles. I'm folded in half with my shins to my face and my feet above my head. Katrina climbs up on Tiffany's shoulders, then places her hands on my feet, lifts her legs up into midair straight in front of her and balances on me. I realize I'm not breathing and all I can think is we need to hold this for three seconds. As we came down I took a deep breath, one skill down! After that I moved through the next minute of the routine just thinking "point my toes, give facials, and stay tight." Then it was time for the "Over Arch," the skill nobody else in my

gym can do. Tiffany stands in position with one leg bent in front and the other leg straight behind her. Katrina climbs onto her shoulders. I place one hand on Tiffany's shoulders and the other hand on the back leg thigh and push up into a hand stand. Then Katrina grabs hands with Tiffany and presses her legs up so she is balanced by their joined hands. Now is time for me to arch backwards in my handstand until my butt almost touches the back of my head. Unable to breathe I reach my position and hold for one Mississippi, two Mississippi, and three Mississippi. We did it! With our final skill done perfectly, I knew the Championship was ours. All three of our hearts pounded in anticipation for our score. We watched our competition in hopes we would not see a routine done more perfectly than ours. Finally, our names were on the big screen in first with a score of 52.95. One goal down, two more left to go.

Based on the National performances and scores, the judges select who is going to be on the National Junior Olympic Acrobatic Team. This team was important to me because it gave me the opportunity to go to the Olympic training center in Texas to work with the best coaches in the world and meet Olympic gymnastics coach Bela Karolyi. I would get to work with some of the best gymnast in the world there. One way to secure a spot on the team is to have the highest Level 8 score of all trios and pairs that were at the meet. The day after my trio competed, we returned to the venue to see if our names were listed. Turns out, we had done it by having the highest score of all Level eights. One by one my dreams were coming true, second goal down.

Finally, on the last day of competitions, it was time for my pair. I was worried because we had been struggling in warm up on one skill near the end of our routine. We had it mastered earlier in the season but my partner had a growing spurt, which affected this trick a lot. It is surprising how growing a couple of inches can change how you do a skill. With no more time to work on it and trying not to let our nerves get the best of us, it was time to compete. We saluted to the judges and walked to our beginning pose on that big blue floor. The bright lights were beaming down on us to where we could barely see. The first half of our routine was so perfect that it made my mom cry. As soon as we neared the difficult skill, we began to get shaky. We tried the trick and failed. As the skill came tumbling straight down to the floor, every possible thing was running through my mind. What do we do now? How can we gain points? Finally, we tried it again and got it the second time. By doing it twice, we got off with our music, and Katrina was flustered. She then ended up not holding her individual skill and we finished the end of the routine awkwardly. When you don't do as well as you know you're capable of, it's frustrating. I had to take a few minutes to myself to shake it off. No, I did not achieve my third goal but we did place fourth even with all those mistakes at the end. I was still extremely proud of what we had accomplished that season. I had no idea we could ever achieve the tricks we ended up mastering, such as a flipping skill where I toss Katrina over my head. I just had to keep in mind that even with hard work and dedication, things don't always go perfectly and goals might not be achieved but it's not the end of the world. From all

of this I did learn something about life, setting goals is important but it's not always about whether you reach them or not. It is about doing your best and having fun along the way. Still to this day, I have those medals I won hanging from my bedroom walls.

A Part of Me

Summer Howe



People's life experiences, family traits, disabilities and perceptions molded together and infused into them makes the person they become. There have been many things that have shaped my life. Hearing stories about my grandma's relationships has taught me about marriage. My loved ones with disabilities have made me more patient and understanding. Involvement in gymnastics has made me learn how to deal with criticism and trust. Come to find out, in "Casa: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood" by Judith Cofer, "Mother Tongue" by Amy Tan, and "Graduation Day" by Maya Angelou, all have dealt with similar issues. The relationships of my grandma, loved ones with disabilities and being involved with activities have had a major role in my life and created a part of me.

My most valuable lesson in life has been from listening to my grandma's experiences just like in the story by Cofer. The women in Cofer's family gathered to talk about their lives. Cofer states, "They told real-life stories though, as I later learned, always embellishing them with a little or a lot of dramatic detail" (152). Like in Cofer's story, my grandma discusses her wisdom and memories from her life. One story grandma told me was

about her marriage to an abuser. One day she returned home from lunch with a friend and the minute she walked in the door she knew things were going to get bad. Her ex-husband immediately exploded into a violent rage because he felt she should always be home ready to wait on him. At first he was just yelling but it quickly turned into punching. After that incident, she knew she had to get out of the relationship. One evening after he went to work, she had friends and family come to the house to quickly pack her stuff and get her out. I can't imagine how scared she must have been and I have great respect for her having the courage to get out of the situation. If that would ever happen to me, I now know what I should do and how to handle it. I also have a better understanding from Grandma of how an abuser will feel guilty after an outburst and try to make it up. She said after that happened the next week she was getting phone call after phone call from him. He would apologize and say such sweet things to her to get her back. He would offer to take her out and treat her better. Eventually she gave him another chance. My grandma then realized that was a bad choice and the same thing happened again. My grandma's experiences have set some of my moral beliefs like respecting others and getting away from abuse.

Just as my families relationships have affected my life so has their disabilities similar to Tan's story. My entire life my grandma has been hearing impaired. I would like to say her hearing disability has never bothered me but I'm ashamed to say that isn't completely true. In the story by Tan, she was embarrassed by her mother's lack of ability to speak proper English. She says "I think my mother's English almost had an effect on limiting

my possibilities in life as well" (Tan 206). Like her, at times I have been embarrassed by my Grandmother's hearing disability. She tends to talk and laugh extremely loud which can really attract attention in a public place. One time, we were out to lunch at a small tea room and she was telling me one of her stories. All of a sudden I realize nobody else in the place was saying a word because they were all listening to her. I must have had a strange look on my face because Grandma asked me, "Am I talking to loud?" As I have gotten older, I've tried to be more understanding. Her hearing impairment has also made me realize how important it is to look at someone when you are talking, speak distinctly and not necessarily louder because that just over amplifies according to grandma. Just as her hearing has impacted me, so has my uncle's multiple sclerosis. One of my uncle's biggest issues is with balance and double vision. He falls often and when I'm with him I constantly watch for him to start wobbling so I can help keep him from falling. His MS has made me appreciate my ability to do the small things in life like simply walking down a hill. In Tan's story people judged her mom, thinking she wasn't smart because of her English. Tan says, "You should know that my mother's expressive command of English belies how much she actually understands" (204). Sometimes people have judged my uncle, thinking he was drunk. I try not to jump to conclusions if someone is stumbling around because they may just have a medical issue. Living around those with disabilities has made me a more compassionate person.

Another thing that has influenced my life is overcoming people's criticism and perceptions as well as believing in myself just like Angelou. When reading Angelou's story I really understood how she felt aggravated after listening to the speaker. Angelou writes, "There was no 'nobler in the mind' for Negroes because the world didn't think we had minds, and they let us know it" (112). Though I

have never had to experience major prejudice like Angelou had to, I have experienced what it's like to be put down and criticized. From the age of five I've been involved in gymnastics. I worked hard over the years to become the best I could but in the end, sometimes that is not what your coach wants. In my last year of gymnastics I was competing against my coach's daughter. She would do all she could to get me below her. She would change my routine to make it look bad and if I changed it back to how I liked it, she would threaten to kick me out of her gym. Like most things in life though, there are always critics. Angelou says, "It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense" (111). In the gym I would get yelled at for the littlest things like getting chalk on the floor. I would have to clean it up while others could do it and it would be fine. I must say though, some of my toughest critics have made me better and also made me realize I never want to treat others that way. Each experience, good or bad, has taught me lessons and made me who I am.

My life is a result of lessons learned from those I love, watching family live with disabilities and overcoming criticism. From my grandma I know what I want out of life in my future relationships. I have become a more compassionate person when it comes to disabilities because of my grandma and uncle. My experiences in sports have made me understand more about myself. All the things I've been taught I will pass on to my kids. Every aspect that's been passed on to me has become a part of me and helped shape who I am.

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My Foundation to Literacy

Summer Howe



The basic element of education is literacy. It is the cornerstone from which learning is built. I grew up in a home full of books and a family that loves reading. Even with all that, learning to read and write didn't come easy for me. With the help of some good teachers, I have found writing to be a great way to express myself and to tell my stories. In reading "One Writer's Beginnings" by Eudora Welty, "Becoming Educated" by Barbara Jordan and "Learning to Write" by Russell Baker, along with my interviews with David Copeland and Patricia Wilson, I have found similarities as well as differences with them in my literacy experiences. Like Jordan I had to study longer and harder than most and like Welty, I grew up surrounded by books. Unlike Baker though, I don't like to procrastinate and I differed from Copeland by the type of schools we started in. Living in a home surrounded by books, overcoming my struggles with comprehension and learning to express myself by writing are the foundations to my literacy.

When I was little, there were always lots of books in every room of the house just like in Welty's essay. This includes the bathroom where my dad keeps the most current book he is reading, although I cannot understand how he can spend so much time in the bathroom reading. When I entered grade school and

the teacher sent home the book order form every month, I never had a doubt my mom would order me one. I would always get excited to look at that book order form and order the newest Junie B. Jones book. In a way, my home was similar to Welty who writes "I was presented, from as early as I can remember, with books of my own, which appeared on my birthday and Christmas morning. Indeed, my parents could not give me books enough" (301). Though Welty and her family struggled more than my family to afford books I would still get just as happy to get them for my birthday and Christmas. I learned in my interview with Copeland that he was raised in a small town in Arkansas and had a similar background as he stated "There were always newspapers, books and magazines in our home and daily reading." My grandma Howe would sometimes watch me while my parents worked and I have fond memories of her reading books to me quite often, if I wasn't busy watching Barney. Since my Grandma Howe had been an elementary teacher, she knew the importance of reading to children at an early age. I enjoyed my grandmother reading to me. My favorites were the Dr. Seuss books, especially The Foot Book which she would patiently read over and over again to me. I loved the rhymes and rhythms of his stories which left me laughing along with my grandma. In my interview with Wilson, she also had fond memories of being read to. Wilson says, "My dad would read story books to me when I was little. I would memorize words and try to read them to my brother." She spent her early childhood years in a Catholic school. With all the books around, I should have picked up on reading quite easily and enjoyed it. However, that wasn't necessarily the case for me.

Learning doesn't always come easily to me similar to Jordan in her essay. My early school years of learning to read and write were in my elementary classes with about twenty five other students. This was unlike Copeland who says "I went to a country school and my first three years of school was all in one room." I can't imagine having three grades combined in one room and trying to learn, but he said he really enjoyed it. Though the class sizes I had may not seem large to some, I did better learning in smaller groups. Even in elementary I would have school work to take home sometimes. As soon as I got to high school, I always had a backpack full of homework to take home. I had to study for hours in complete silence with no one around in order to remember and fully comprehend what I'm reading. When I would come to school the next day I always asked my classmates if they studied and most of them would reply no. That made me feel good about my hours of studying because I felt I would surely do better than them on the test. When we would get our scores back they were usually about the same and we would laugh because I put in a lot more time. Even though my life is quite different than Jordan's, I can still relate to her. Jordan was an African American woman that attended Boston University Law School during a time of racism and sexism. The women at the school were only allowed to ask questions in class on certain days. In my college I don't have to wait for a certain day to answer questions in class thankfully. The one thing I do understand is when Jordan says, "I felt that in order to compensate for what I had missed in earlier years, I would have to work harder, and study longer, than anybody else" (212). Patricia also related to that by stating

"Learning how to write cursive was a challenge. To help myself get better at it I would always make improvements on my penmanship and work on it with my dad." I remember in elementary school my mom would make flash cards with my spelling words on them for me. She would pick one from the stack, read the word, and ask me to spell it. We would do that over and over again until I had them all down. I still use that technique now in college to help myself get prepared for big test in my classes. Working hard in high school did pay off in the end for me with good grades and most importantly made me more prepared for the future.

Developing a love of expressing myself with my writing also began in high school but unlike Baker, I don't like to procrastinate till the very last minute. Baker states, "I took the list home and dawdled until the night before the essay was due. Sprawled on the sofa, I finally faced up to the grim task, took the list out of my notebook, and scanned it" (268). I'm quite the opposite as I like to start my writing assignments as soon as possible. I have found there are times when I struggle with just the first line and it may take me hours to figure out what to write. If I waited until the last minute, I would worry that I couldn't get the paper written. This would be especially true if the assignment was big. My junior year of high school I was assigned a ten page research paper over drinking and driving. It was an assignment that I did very well on. There were many things I had to do even before I could start the actual writing. I had to gather information and statistics as well as have notes from all kinds of different sources like books, magazines and newspapers. I even did a couple of interviews in order to have other people's points of view

on the topic and I wrote about my own personal experience about getting hit by a drunk driver. With all of this I feel like if I had procrastinated like Baker did, I would not have had a successful paper. Even though I differ with Baker in doing my paper in a timely matter, I do find we are similar in the way we both have found enjoyment out of telling a personal story in writing. Baker says, “I did my best to avoid showing pleasure, but what I was feeling was pure ecstasy at this startling demonstration that my words had the power to make people laugh” (269). Wilson also expressed her love of writing during our interview as she says “To write is amazing because it makes us think and gets our thoughts and ideas to be better understood.” I also feel pleasure when I know that my writing has affected someone. Whether it makes people laugh or teaches them something they didn’t know, I find writing can be powerful and sometimes healing. In writing my ten page paper, it made me feel that if my words could touch just one person, make someone think before getting behind the wheel of a car after drinking, then maybe it could prevent an accident or possibly save a life. Then again, it may not have had an effect on anyone but it was a great way to express my feelings on the subject.

Literacy has been and continues to be the key to my education. From my early years of being surrounded by books in my home to my Grandmother reading me Dr. Seuss, the enjoyment of listening to stories got me off to the right start. With the help of great teachers and my parents, I was able to overcome and learn how to deal with my struggles in reading and comprehension. Through my high school English classes I found enjoyment in writing. These are the literacy building

blocks from which my foundation of learning was created.

Her Return

Shyra Jackson



Today is award day. It is special because I am selected to receive the principals' award. This is given out every year to the student who shows the most academic achievement.

I got all dressed up in my good clothing and prepared to walk to school. As I am walking I practice my award smile, so that people will think it came as somewhat of a surprise when the leader of the ceremony calls my name. As I arrive to school and take my seat, I begin to do the work the teacher had prepared for us to do until the ceremony starts. An hour has passed and the teacher announces that it's time to go. We line up and march down to the gym where the ceremony is being held. As we walk in, I can see all these people sitting down; some are schoolmates, parents, friends, or relatives.

As we walk to our seats, I begin to sit back in my chair out of nervousness. I don't like being the center of attention, but with this award everyone's eyes will be on me. As the ceremony started and the other schoolmates' names are being called, I clap, silently awaiting my turn. All I can think of while I wait is smile, don't trip, hold your head up, and look her in the eyes. As my row is being called, I start to smile even harder. I look up at her, then standup and wait until the other students walk back to their seats. I position myself

and wait for her to announce and pin the award on my shirt. I am so nervous I'm shaking a little bit. As I begin to wipe my sweaty hands on my pants, I look up to scan the crowd to see if any of my family has come, giving myself the benefit of the doubt because I hoped this time would be different. My mother had finally come to town. She had arrived a couple days earlier, and I and my family were so excited that she was coming, seeing as though we hadn't seen her in forever. She wasn't really around when I was growing up because she was deemed unfit, and we were taken away from her. Our grandmother took me and my siblings in, so we didn't see her much often. So when she does come to visit, it's always a big occasion.

After a 12 hour drive from San Diego, she had finally arrived. I hadn't seen her in 4 years and even with the plenty of photos and phone calls, I couldn't remember what she had looked like. We were so excited that she was coming home; we cleaned the house to make it look as perfect as possible. We got all of our good work out hoping she had brought us something in return for doing so well in school. As we were still preparing for her arrival, she called and said she was a couple minutes away, so I and my family waited in front of the living room window waiting to see her pull up into the drive way. We were trying not to put our hands on the glass; the excitement and temptation was so alive in the room; we wanted everything to be perfect when she arrived. We talked in suspense about what we all wanted to tell her and if she'd changed since the last time we've all seen her.

As soon as we stopped talking we had seen her car pull into the drive way; those big bright lights filled the whole living room. We could see her smiling threw

her window as she pulled her car into the driveway. As she turned off her ignition and opened up her car door to get out, we all ran out the door to her and gave her a group hug. She hugged and kissed us all individually and looked at us one by one to see how much we had changed. She hugged me so tight and kissed me all over my face. I hugged her for a minute longer because she smelled so good; the smell was so classic to me, like an ocean breeze or a blossoming rose; she smelled exactly the same as she did the last time I'd seen her. I looked her right in the face—she had the prettiest smile. It was radiant like sunshine through a raindrop, uplifting to where she could warm the coldest heart; it was like a silent secret that only I knew. She had the prettiest skin; it was caramel and smooth as leather. She didn't look like what I had pictured her, but it didn't matter to me. As we walked in the house she asked us all how we were doing and we walked her over and showed her all of our work, she was so happy that we were doing so well. We all felt so happy and grateful that she was actually here with us.

The next day we woke up to her cooking us breakfast: Pancakes, eggs, bacon, and toast. It smelled so good. As we were eating she told us about her trip and how it went. We had never been out of the city of St Louis before, so when she was telling us about her trip and what she had seen we were more than happy that she wanted to share her adventure with us. Later that day, we drove around with her to visit all of our family, so that she could visit them while she was here. As we arrived they hugged and kissed and caught up on past events that she had missed. I just stood in the background smiling in disbelief. After they caught up we left and went to go get

some food. As we ate, it was silent but the air was filled with amusement.

As the following week passed we did everything a family was supposed to do; we played games together, went to events, went on the Mississippi River Trail, down to the Riverfront, to the arch, and we even drove by our old neighborhood. The next day she made an announcement that she was staying for good.

All of a sudden I hear my name being called, and I realize someone is cheering so loudly that everyone is turning around to see who this blatant lady, bursting with all of this noise. I scanned the room to see who it was. I look up and it's my mother cheering and calling my name. For the first time I have someone cheering for me, she cheered so loud until she couldn't anymore. At the end of the ceremony, I run and hug her, and she gives me some balloons and a card with 5 dollars in it. As I hug her I cry so hard in enjoyment; I wasn't expecting this at all from her. I am so ecstatic, joyful, and overwhelmed, that she had really come. After the ceremony finally ends she talks to my teachers for the first time and we go and get ice cream. She is so happy for me, but in a sense I am happier for her. Happy that she got to enjoy what made me so happy. That night after we get home, she tucks me into bed and tells me she is so proud of me. For the first time in a long time, I finally feel worthy that she is acknowledging something that I'm doing. And I will always remember that for the rest of my life.

A Literate World

Melissa Lloyd



To different people there will be different definitions of what being literate means. Literacy is usually being represented through education in school. If you are educated you are literate but, it is really deeper than what we can learn in a classroom. Before my English 100 class I have never in life thought twice about how I knew what “LOL” meant or what slang phrases and posts were used on Facebook that’s being literate but, I had no idea. After reading Eudora Welty in “One Writers Beginnings,” I have seen a connection between the two of us but, in an opposite way, her and her family struggled to stay literate by trying to afford and keep books in the house unlike me I was very fortunate to have almost everything I needed when learning to read. When it comes to Frederick Douglass in “How I Learned to Read and Write,” him and I also have a similar connection, he was a child slave who wanted to become educated so badly so that in some point in time he could become free, and I was becoming educated in life and I didn’t have much of a choice I was made to go to school. Also with the connection of Barbra Jordan in “Becoming Educated” she pushed herself to keep up with the other students. I to struggled with reading and other subjects in school but, I never felt as if I had to overwhelm myself with studying like she did. Maybe because of the technology which I knew much

about helped me stay on the same level with my peers. All of these writers and situations have opened my eyes to a deeper meaning of literacy. I am literate not only because I was educated in school but, because of the worlds impact on me with technology and also my families belief in me.

My relation to Welty is a comical one, considering that she and I are exact opposites when it comes to becoming literate in life. I do believe that to be literate at first does start off with learning how to read. Welty states multiple times throughout her story that both of her parents struggled to afford books in the house. I have always been given the privilege to have an education and my parents made the sacrifice to send me to a private school, they paid so much money each month for me to get a high top education. My struggle has never been hard like Welty’s they struggled and sacrificed everything for books. I feel as though I see that Welty wanted to become literate through reading but, it started at a young age. “[She] learned from the age of two or three that any room in [her] house at any time of day was there to read in, or to be read to” (Welty 298). From that point in the essay I feel as if becoming literate was not a choice in her household. In my household it was a choice on whether you wanted to read or not. After reading this essay I see now that it was put upon me also at a young age whether I wanted to become literate at a certain age. Of course I became literate in many other ways because I attended school, but whether I wanted to read outside of the class room was completely my choice. My mother has worked as a librarian for thirty plus years, and my grandmother has always had a love for reading, so of course they tried

their best to get my siblings and me to read as well. I can see Welty having a great relationship with her mother because they have something in common which is reading. Welty discussed in this essay that her mother has been reading since her childhood as well “the novels of her girlhood that had stayed on in her imagination” (Welty 299). My mother and I’s relationship grew because I struggled with reading when I was growing up, and because of my mother putting me into reading classes, and she sat with me every night helping me learn the basics of reading. I was now becoming literate in life, starting at young age. I can somehow connect with Frederick Douglass in “How I Learned to Read and Write,” because although I have never been a slave I have been young just as he was. He wasn’t given the opportunity to get an education like I did when I was young and still do. In our community today it is quite sad that the youth doesn’t have the thirst for knowledge like Douglass does. Douglass stated “this bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would have me that more valuable bread of knowledge” (Douglass 272). He went through the struggle of giving the kids on the street bread just for anything they knew about reading, he was determined to obtain any form of literacy. I cannot relate to that type of pain he went through just to learn something since I have been given an education for thirteen years now. We all want to be literate but, at what we choose. When it comes to online social networks, the newest technology, we all want to understand how they work because, we want to be involved. We all strive to keep up with things that are crucial to fitting in with our peers that sur-

round us. Even with the smallest form of education such as the basics of reading we now as a young generation can take that and flip it into slang. Douglass stated that how he might have learned to write, was through working at the ship-yard “frequently seeing the ship carpenters...getting a piece of timber ready for use, write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended” (Douglass 275). Most people know how to write but, is that the same as typing? Many in today’s world know how to type on cellphones and type on computers, but they are not real sentences. Since there is so many slang phrases such as “brb, lmao, lol, ttyl” I feel as that’s why many people today don’t know how to use correct punctuation, or how to write a correct fully thought out sentences. What is the use of knowing grammar when you can get by in life without using it? Yes, we choose to keep up with the latest trends but, we don’t care as much about getting educated is the problem.

As I see myself each year becoming more and more involved with technology I see how I can relate myself to Jordan. It’s not that she and I are the same, but we are opposites. It was brought to my attention that maybe Jordan wouldn’t be as happy with how my peers and I take studying. She was still in a decade where discrimination was still around, with her being black and also female so for her to overcome those things she couldn’t help she bettered herself by educating herself. “I still did not want my colleagues to know what a tough time I was having understanding the concepts, the words, the ideas, the process. I didn’t want them to know that,” Jordan states. I never in life have had to hide that I wasn’t good at

something because, even if I want the best I was alright. I never fell behind but, at the same time I didn't make the best grades, many could say I was just a basic student, a C average student. And to me that was fine, I passed right? Jordan wanted more than just something average she wanted a great grade as well as making sure she was able to engage in intellectual conversations "I was excited when I would get called upon to recite in class," Jordan says. So wondering about all the effort Jordan put in to stay educated, to stay on the same level as her other classmates how would she feel knowing that the students of this time don't give much effort. The kids of this time in my opinion are more worried about electronics than they are about education.

As long as we know what's going on with our circle of friends we will be okay right? That coming from the mind of someone who knows just as much about computers, cell phones, and other high tech technology as the next young person. Also coming from someone who is guilty of using half sentences, and abbreviating everything through a text almost every single day. I see in today's world with my generation of young people we don't need as much education to get around. When coming to my conclusion of how I became literate by the age of eighteen, I see that I have the best of both worlds. My parents have sacrificed so much for me to be educated that they sent me to a private school to get the best education around. At the same time though I can see that I am literate in many other ways outside of the classroom. I am young so I am going to engage in things that interest people my age. I want to fit in just like the next person, so without even knowing, I have been educating myself in knowing all about Twitter, computers, ipads, cellphones and other

technology. I realize that I am the exact opposite of both Douglass, Jordan, and Welty but, because of them I see how fortunate my life has been, and that I did not have to go through the struggle of trying to become literate on my own. I am literate thanks to my parents and the help of my generation.

Neglectful Benefit

Stephanie Malone



When I was younger, I looked up to my dad a bit more than the average child would. Who wouldn't when their father was in the Army and their family got special privileges that the common, middle-class family didn't get? However, not everything was given to us, to me, when I was younger. I had to learn the hard way that I wasn't my father's first priority, but I learned something better from him, something that influences me to this very day. My dad has influenced my life by teaching me the value of hard work and how to control my emotions.

The normal work hours for someone in the Army was from five in the morning to about four in the afternoon, so I never saw my dad in the mornings unless he had a 'late start' or when he didn't have Physical Training – P.T. for short – in the mornings, but I remember very clearly waiting around like a little kid on Christmas morning for four o'clock to roll around because that was when my dad would always walk in through the front door. He was the average height for the normal North American man, but when you're barely three feet tall, such a man was easily a giant. Every weekday was the same; get up in the morning, eat, go to school, come home, do homework or play a game, and then set up camp by the front door until four

o'clock rolled around, and when he came home, we had the same conversation.

"You're home! Mommy, Daddy's home!" I would shout out as if my mom hadn't heard the truck pull up.

"Did you do your homework?" Was the first thing he would always ask once he managed to pry my hands off of him before going over to the couch, sit down, and then working to get the knee-high, three pound, brown colored boots with enough shoe lace on them for a young child to play jump rope with, off.

"Yes," would be my drawled out reply.

"Did you take the dog on a walk?"

"No."

"Go do that."

And with those three words, I was dismissed while he went off to go change into "civilian clothes" and then eat dinner. It was the normal routine that we had and it rarely changed. On the days that it did change, the only difference would be me sitting at the kitchen table struggling with math or cause-and-effect sentences. On those days, he would give me a blank look that I quickly learned to associate with my mom going over to the neighbor and asking them if they wouldn't mind tutoring me for an hour or so.

The only time I ever had than five minutes alone with him was when I brought home a test, quiz, or report card and handed it to him. While he looked it over, I would stand in front of him fidgeting from foot to foot; swing my shoulder one way and then the other, my hands behind my back as I waited for the smile and the "good job" that would come with the good grades, but no other reward. Seeing the smile, a slight tilt of the corners of thin lips that showed just the barest hint of white teeth, and hearing the two words in his slightly diluted southern

accent was more than enough. As I grew sorrow into my work or, if the teacher had older though, those two things became n't assigned any work, walk the dog or harder and harder to get yet I worked play in the backyard with a ball, kicking it harder and harder in school just to get around and working out my feelings on it. them. Nothing mattered to me besides get- Whatever it was that I decided to do, I al- ting him to smile and hearing the drawled ways kept out of his line of sight. Why? I "good job". had failed in what mattered most to him. I

Eventually, he stopped giving me wouldn't be able to look in him in the face those two things but when I started to ac- without breaking down in tears or throw- tually pay attention to the work, the fellow ing a tantrum about how I had done my students, and the teacher, I was finally no- best and that I should have still gotten a ticed that I was always one of the best stu- "good job" for doing that much, but I knew dents in class and of the few children that that it wouldn't do me any good. He was a always had an answer. All those times man born and raised on a farm and there where I did whatever I could to get my fa- had been no time on a farm for any one ther's approval had ended in one, land- person to sit around and mope or to waste mark achievement: becoming a hard work- time crying. "Either do something to useful er in my studies. Whether or not that had or go to your room and stay there until been his intention all along, I honestly you're needed" was one of the few things cannot say. he would say to me if I didn't manage to

Like all children, there were times get rid of the tears or calmed down fast where I didn't bring home a good grade on enough for his liking. It was through this a test, quiz, or report card and his silence, that I managed to master my control over dear Lord that *silence* was always harsher my emotions.

than getting one of my mother's lectures or being grounded for a week or so. On those saw at dinner time on the weekdays, and days, I would be a statue in front of my dad, not moving, not blinking, barely dar- has such an effect on me? He might be my ing to breathe as I waited like a criminal before a judge and jury for my verdict. When he finally put the marked paper needed an answer or when I was bouncing down, he would look at me with his blue eyes, around, happy about being one year older, one year closer to no longer being a kid.

a blank face, and a slight downward tilt of his lips until I would flinch and shuffle off to my room to hold back the tears, calm down, and then drag my bag out to break out the books on the kitchen table and go over the parts that I didn't do well on. It's only now that he's around, but I don't resent him for that. No, he might have been there for his country, family, wife, and then drag my bag out to break and my sister, but I ended up learning out the books on the kitchen table and go from him anyway and he ended up teach-

Those days I would go from being a ever learn.

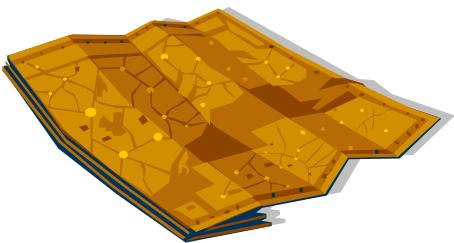
bubbly, always grinning, hyper child to a child that wouldn't look away from the floor and dragged my feet as if they were est things that my father could have covered in cement. On these days I would taught me. I am full grown now and still put my own disappointment, anger, and value these two things, even if they are

The value of hard work and how to control my emotions are two of the great- est things that my father could have taught me. I am full grown now and still put my own disappointment, anger, and value these two things, even if they are

harder to obtain now than they were back when I was six years older and in first grade. He might not have given me the attention or the affection that any growing child needed, might not have been there when I needed him the most, but he was still around long enough to teach me the two greatest life lessons that I would have ever needed to know.

Roadmap to Learning

Stephanie Malone



All over the world there is a great emphasis on knowing how to learn that has become a universal understanding. The topics we learn are vastly different; many people do not put a great emphasis on learning how to read and write properly or at what is expected of their age level. Personally, I remember when I first started to scratch the mysterious lines and arcs known as the alphabet onto a piece of paper just as well as I learned how to stutter out a word on a starch white paper. In Frederick Douglass's essay "How I Learned to Read and Write" he describes how important it is to know how to read and write when he was in a shipyard and "...frequently seeing the ship carpenters... write on the timber the name of that part of the ship for which it was intended" (275). Just like with Frederick Douglass, reading and writing have become the tools that I used as a means of escaping my life, if only temporarily.

I remember being in kindergarten and learning the ABC's. The teacher had a long, thin stick that she would use to tap against a stapled line of alphabets, pronounce it for the class, and then have us repeat it to her before moving on to the next letter. As far as I know, this is how most people learn the foundations of their language. My kindergarten teacher was much the same as Douglass's Master's wife "...a kind and tender-hearted woman..." (Douglass 271). In my young, impressionable mind she seemed to be the world's best teacher: patient with the students, a smile always on her face even when one of us did something completely stupid, and had helped us deal with being away from our mothers for more than an

hour or two. Growing up in a bilingual (two languages) home, the English alphabet had been a rather daunting task but she helped me through it...until she talked with my parents. After that conversation, she had tried her best to close the door to my learning. I outwitted her though, and managed to go on to the first grade, but perhaps this is why I cannot remember her name.

This is much how Douglass describes being taught how to write. His mistress, Mrs. Auld, taught him the alphabet and when she started to teach him how to "...spell words of three or four letters" (Douglass 270), Mr. Auld found out and forced her to stop. Unlike myself, however, Douglass had overheard what Mr. Auld told Mrs. Auld and used that as a way to push himself to continue learning.

If a person knows me, they would be surprised to learn that I hated learning how to write. My letters never turned out the way I had practiced in the copy-books. They were placed too far apart so that a single, three letter word took up a quarter of the line, I would forget to dot my 'i's or to cross my 't's, and if not for the two solid lines and the single dotted line in the middle, no doubt my sentences would have ended up looking like an optical illusion. No, I ignored the complexities that was writing and turned my attention to reading. I wouldn't have to write any letters on the beginner books I was given, not even my name because my teacher had done that for me. It was in the first grade that a whole new world had opened up to me. It might have been a simple book with a tiny, two-line narrative for the teacher to read, and barely more than eight big, bold words underneath a picture for me to read, but the stories themselves offered a way for me to escape the mocking laughter of my classmates, and the scornful looks on my parents' face when I struggled with making a letter or forming a word. It was in its own way an escape from slavery.

Compared to Douglass, I had it rather easy. During the time that Douglass's Mistress, Mrs. Auld, prevented him from learning how to read inside of her home,

he had made friends with the resident not to learn how to write, for it had seemed pointless to me. "There was no white boys. When he had finished an errand early, Douglass would go to one of them to "...get a lesson before my return" (Douglass 272). However, it wasn't free. Douglass and the white boys had a barter system; Douglass would give them bread, and "...in return, [they] would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge" (Douglass 272). In Douglass's essay, he describes that they used to talk about slavery and how he wished he "... could be as free as they would be when they got to be men" (273). Douglass had told them: "You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life!* Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?" (273).

Learning how to read had given me freedom. I had always been told that I "daydream too much" by my mother and my many teachers. As a rather creative child, books had opened a door to a completely new way of being creative. "I read them over and over again with abated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance" (Douglass 273). I could have died happy when I read to my teacher not only the big bold words at the bottom, but the tiny words at the top of every single page as well. After my "reading assessment" it was a pleased teacher that had announced to the class a few minutes later that we would be going to the library in order to learn how to check out books. I couldn't believe what I was hearing! We were to go to the library – the one place in the whole school that none of us had ever been to yet – to check out books and take home to care for as our own.

I had been delighted until the school library told us that we would have to write our name on the check-out card, and turn the card into the front desk. At that moment I had felt nothing but horror. Writing with the letters and the arches and big heavy pencils that made my fingers hurt just to check-out a book? Was this divine punishment? I had done everything that I could think of in order

to learn how to write, for it had seemed pointless to me. "There was no getting rid of it" (274) as Frederick Douglass has so eloquently put it. Why write out a thought when one can simply speak it? However, for the books and only for the books, I would learn the torture that was writing. Up until third grade I had to take "writing remedial lessons," but I cannot say that it wasn't worth it. The librarians knew me by sight from any angle of my head and often helped me make sure that I got my letters right. My teacher, Mrs. Chambers, was often proud of my progress and would let me run special errands for her to the office. There I would get even more free lessons on writing and sentence structure – as well as free candy – from the secretaries that found me to be "adorably polite and sweet." They would even go so far as to "allow" me to help them write notes or a "to-do list" for them when they had their hands full with one thing or another, and this was when I started to wonder about something. If words can be used to write a thought, could I use words to make up my own story?

That one thought sparked my creative writing career. From third grade to my freshman year at college, I have been writing small stories, some scrapped before they get more than a page long and others that end up becoming novel length that I keep for my own personal collection. There is no doubt in my mind that I will continue to write and perhaps I will go on to end up writing a collection of books that someday everyone will read.

My writing experience is vastly different from Frederick Douglass's. The first way he learned how to write was when he was in Durgin and Bailey's shipyard and saw the ship carpenters write four different letters on timbers. Once he had learned what the letters meant and had copied them down, Douglass had "... met with any boy who I knew could write, I would tell him I could write as well as he" (Douglass 275). The boy would then tell him to write because he didn't believe him, and once Douglass had written

down the letters, would challenge the boy to "...beat that" (Douglass 275). Douglass had to use board fences, brick walls, and pavement as his paper and chalk as his writing utensil. However, he only truly learned how to write when his Master Thomas went off to school; left his completed copy-books at home, and when Douglass's mistress was gone from the house, would pull out Master Thomas's copy-books and practice.

By learning how to read and write, Frederick Douglass was able to escape from slavery for good. When I learned how to read and write, I was able to escape from a harsh reality that I didn't believe I could survive in. If I have to say one thing about my learning how to read and write, I will say this: learning is a must; there is no escaping that no matter where in the world you go, for reading and writing are the foundations of our lives.

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Supporting the Young

Mariah Murphy



In the book *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, he tells the story of another young man named Wes Moore and himself. Considering they had the same first and last name, they also had the same background growing up. Wes One and Wes Two were born blocks apart in Baltimore within a year of each other. They both grew up without fathers in the household. Wes One only had a couple memories of his father. As Wes One explains he knew his father but due to health issues Wes One's dad eventually passed away. As for Wes Two, he never met his father but as interesting as it seems Wes One explains, "But his father's mother spoiled him." It was always Wes Two and his mother Mary Moore. But as time goes on, both of the Weses began to go down the same road of destruction. Both Weses began to get in trouble with law enforcement. They both got into numerous altercations with other children which led to the outrageous behavior of both boys. Eventually, the boys grew up and Wes One ended up with a great support system and Wes Two ends up with a world of terror and falsely claiming innocence. Wes Moore claims that with great mentors, role models and a support system you can become someone so much better than what you grew up as. Like Wes One with the support system of my family and my role models,

I've become a great creator of my future.

As Wes number one grows up in the book *The Other Wes Moore*, his mother Joy Thomas became very concerned with his up-coming in the neighborhood. Considering there were a lot of fights and drugs going on in the neighborhood, it struck all around Wes One's home. As Wes One states, "Our neighborhood was getting more and more dangerous; there had been a rash of break-ins in the houses around us" (Moore 36). Wes number one's mother finally came to the conclusion to move out of their Baltimore neighborhood to the Bronx. As Joys stated, "Mom, if it's all right, I think we need to move up there. I can't do this anymore." Then Wes One explains, "Three weeks later, Nikki, Shani, and I all stood outside our car, staring with something like disbelief at our now empty home. This was it. We were actually leaving Maryland." (Moore 37) This is the beginning of his mom supporting his future. She knew that was going to be for the better. As Wes One states, "My mother decided soon after our move to the Bronx that I was not going to public school. She wasn't a snob, she was scared" (Moore 47). Joy knew that if she stayed in Baltimore that Wes was going to end up either in prison or in a grave.

Wes Two's mother didn't support him at all. Considering she was a single mother trying to make it in the economy, she basically let Wes Two do anything he wanted to. Wes Two really didn't have a support system but his older brother, Tony, was a role model to Wes. But Tony didn't make the best decisions. Moore stated, "To Wes, Tony was a "certified gangsta. Tony started dealing drugs in those shadowy hallways of Murphy Homes before he was ten. By the time he was fourteen; Tony had built a fierce rep-

utation in the neighborhood" (Moore 27). For Wes Two, seeing Tony sell drugs was what Wes looked up to. So, as a role model Tony wasn't doing his job. Because as soon as Wes Two got a little older he began selling drugs. When Tony found out he was outraged. As Wes stated, "Tony's fists were clenched and his jaw tense as he eyed his little brother up and down. His stare was serious, and his stances like that of a trained boxer preparing to pounce. Wes's body language was evasive. He refused to look his brother in the eye" (Moore 69). Tony could see that what he was doing was grabbing ahold of Wes Two. But Wes Two was too far in the game to get out now. He continued to do what he had to do. This is where Wes Two's life began to go downhill.

As for myself, I've always seen the drug game to the fullest right in front of my eyes. My aunt was heavy into drugs and considering I spent a lot of time at my granny's house, I was always seeing something go down. I've seen my aunt hide crack pipes underneath the carpet and I've seen my aunt so high that she couldn't sleep for two days straight. My dad let me know as a young girl never to get in to drugs, just because I see my aunt doing them it wasn't okay for me to do them.

So when I would spend the night at my granny's, she would take me out to the park all the time. From the support of my dad and my granny, I learned that falling into the path was not good at all. Just like Wes Two, my granny was a working mom. So she was really never home to spend time with my aunt. I remember my aunt telling me, "Your granny would work a nine to five job and turn around and go into her other job from six to twelve in the morning." But fortunately for me my granny was around a lot more. With this sup-

port I've always had the thought in my head to do better than what my aunt was doing.

For Wes One, with the support of the Military School Valley Forge he made a turn for the good. As Wes states, "With the support of people like Cadet Captain Hill and the others in my chain of command and on the faculty, I'd actually started to enjoy military school" (Moore 115). Wes One looks up to Cadet Captain Hill as a role model because he was the one who put Wes underneath his wing and showed him respect and trust. With Wes underneath Captain Hill's wing, Wes began to excel in academic life as well as the ranks of military school. Wes explains that he gets this book called the *Fab Five* by Mitch Albom. It's about five freshman starters who made it all the way to the national championship game. This was Wes One's favorite book and he now enjoyed reading. Wes One states, "Just as military school had slowly grown on me, so had academic life" (Moore 130). This book is also a role model for Wes. Even though it's a book it gives him the courage to continue to do well, so he can have a future.

As for Wes Two he began to get heavier into the drug game. He got his girlfriend Alicia pregnant and considering he didn't have any father figure in his life, he didn't really yearn for a relationship with his girlfriend and baby. Wes Two left his first girlfriend Alicia and went to another woman named Cheryl and had two more babies, but he left her because she began to do drugs. Then Wes Two got out the drug game and went to Job Corps. As Wes states, "After agonizing over it, Wes decided to go with Levy to his final Job Corps interview. While there, Wes sat down with a counselor and began a conversation" (Moore 140). Then after earning his

degree he decided to go back to the drug game, because he had no positive role models and no support from family and friends. Considering his job wasn't supporting him financially, Wes couldn't make ends meet and live off the low budget job. This is where Tony and Wes Two decided to rob a jewelry store. Then they ended up killing a police officer. Then Wes Two and his brother Tony end up going on trial for murder. Considering Wes Two didn't have any support system, so there for he ended up in jail for the rest of his life.

When I was a freshman and sophomore in high school, I began to get into trouble and get into many altercations. But I had a teacher named Ms. Hatten that would talk to me to calm me down and make sure I was doing okay. I had a lot going on around that time of my life. For example my dad and I had been arguing a lot about family issues. This was affecting my school work. Ms. Hatten said, "Your father is always going to be your father, so that means you will have to deal with him for the rest of your life regardless if you like it or not." With the help of Ms. Hatten, I began to do better in school and considering she was one of my role models that I looked up to, she's the reason why I'm willing to be a success in college. If it wasn't for her then I wouldn't be standing here writing this paper today.

All in all, Both Weses have made different turns in their life. Wes one moves on and become something that everyone strives to be. Wes two ends up in prison and will never end up seeing the outside world. I made a turn for the better for my life. As Wes one explains about his life and how Wes two life starts out as a parallel to each other, but they end up in different situations. It makes me understand the importance of role models

and a support system. This is a lesson everyone can take from this book. That even if you begin to go down the wrong path you can choose to make a better life for yourself. If you can't make the choice then you have a wonderful support system that can back up one hundred percent and make the decision for you. The book allowed me to appreciate the fact that my role models and my support system believed in me one hundred percent. At the end day I'm glad that I got to the read the book to relate it to my life. that my role models and my support system believed in me one hundred percent. At the end day I'm glad that I got to the read the book to relate it to my life.

Taken for Granted

Eric Obermier



To be educated is to understand what goes on around us and to unlock the doors ignorance keeps closed. Becoming educated is simple for some, but for others it can be a struggle. Barbara Jordan tells in her piece "Becoming Educated" how she had tough time learning when in law school and how she had to put in much more effort than her other classmates to keep up. So too did Frederick Douglass, as he tells in his piece "How I Learned to Read and Write" the struggles of the obtaining knowledge, because as a slave it was denied to him. Growing up in my house hold the importance of education became clear very early. Like Douglass thought education was his ticket to freedom, my parents thought education would be the ticket out of hardship and I was always pushed to do my best so that someday I could live much easier than they did. I have had similar struggles like Douglass and Jordan, obtaining information and putting in more effort than others, and was able to use them to obtain a greater understanding of learning and appreciation for education.

Douglass had the hardship of teaching himself to read and write and I too experienced the hardship of having to teach myself. Douglass recalls the norm of his time, "it is almost an unpardonable offense to teach slaves to read" (272) though he did not agree with it. This shows how they did not want slaves like Douglass to

learn and that punishment would be met by doing so, but this did not stop him. Douglass tells how he took every opportunity he could to learn, he traded bread to poor white kids in exchange for knowledge, he would copy letters written on lumber where he worked in Baile's Shipyard, and even copy the copy books of his Master's son and he finally learned. Unlike Douglass I am free to pursue knowledge freely and it is given from a young age to me. The quality, however, wasn't always great and I got a taste of learning something blindly with little help. In high school I got exposed a new type of teacher, one who cared little about teaching and more about talking about their lives. To make matters worse if there was confusion and they were asked for help on the subject, those same teachers would merely say look in the book and proceed to do anything other than their job. It was frustrating, and I would have to spend quite a bit of time looking over the book and looking up what I could online just trying to teach myself what I could just to pass the class. I was able to scrape by with a C+ which isn't a great grade by any means and it is sad how a slave, with no resources, was able to learn much more than me when all the resources are there and no one is stopping me. It shows how the motivation to learn has changed so much. Though the few teachers I had like this were a hindrance, they gave me an appreciation for the ones that want to teach and in my own abilities to learn.

Both Jordan and I had to work harder in school to learn and had to put extra time in studying to keep caught up like everyone else. Jordan talks about how she stayed up until early in the morning studying because she had to just to keep up. Jordan says, "I did not want my colleagues to know what a tough time I was having understanding the concepts, the

words, the ideas, the process" (212). Jordan not only had a tough time but she was embarrassed by this and viewed it as a weakness. Jordan tells how she hid it from her classmates and even studied in the graduate dorm library because no one else studied there. Being a woman and black she was already viewed lesser giving her the burden of also having more to prove. Like Jordan I too not only struggled but I viewed my struggles as weakness and I would often try to hide it. Unlike Jordan I wasn't able to stay caught up even with all the extra time that I put into studying. My struggles have always been with math. It was a subject that didn't make sense to me, I would think I was doing something right just to find out that I was way off. I constantly fell behind and would spend hours and hours on homework that seemed so simple to some of my friends. When we were allowed class time to do homework in groups, I'd always say I was going to do it later because I didn't want people to see how badly I struggled with it. When I finally was able to push past this I learned how obtaining help from my peers wasn't a weakness. I began long for the feedback of others and it helped me learn things better.

Douglass educates himself in hopes that it would someday allow him to escape from slavery and I too am trying to use it to escape my situation. Douglass tells how, as a child, he was being taught to spell by a woman, Mrs. Auld, until her husband put a stop to it. Douglass recites his masters reasoning against his learning to read, "It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master" (270). Douglass tells how these words became his reason to learn, to be free and he set on a path to make it happen even though it was dangerous for

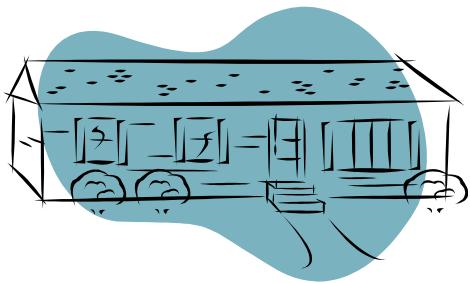
a slave to do. Douglass tells how learning to read and write would allow him to write his own pass to freedom. Douglass tells once he started to really learn it made him detest his master's even more, knowing just how bad his situation was would make him long for the ignorance of his fellow slaves. Like Douglass I feel like educating myself is my key to free myself from burden, the burden of money. My family isn't dirt poor but more upper lower class. We have money to live but in times of hardship the sting is felt deeply. Educating myself towards a good career has been the only way I can think to escape this fate of living check to check and to be able to live comfortably. Douglass was told by his masters that he couldn't learn and I always felt my financial status was telling me that I couldn't either as it seems my family is just barely above the line that allows one to qualify for grants. It has given me my determination to learn and regardless on money I am making it happen.

It is important to be literate as it opens our eyes to the world. It allows us to understand and have a voice towards who leads this country. It is reading and understanding the body language of others around us. Literacy is the interpreting the meaning of an artist's work. There are many forms of literacy and they are our way of understanding the world. In the world today being educated, for the most part, seems to be taken for granted. Knowledge is given from a young age and I think it gets more viewed as a chore than beneficial, making it lose its importance. I hope that the generations to come realize the importance of literacy and education and do not make the mistake of taking such a gift for granted as I know many of mine did. For me its importance is very clear though it might have taken me time to actually realize

that. It is the ticket to make my life easier, to be able to live comfortably. It has helped me realize with the right motivation what we are capable of learning and just how far we can push our boundaries. Through the hardships I have had, I have really learned to appreciate being educated and realize how lucky I am to have it provided since I was young.

My Heaven and Hell

Kirsten Olsson



Life isn't what you think it is ever going to turn out to be. Everything in life is always molding us. It is either chipping off parts of us that we don't want or turning us into the person we want to become. Certain places have the most impact on people. For me it is my ex-boyfriends' house. This house was my comfort spot, yet also tested my strength and showed me a life that I didn't want.

Trent, my ex-boyfriend, house was nothing special. It wasn't a big two story brick house with pillars and a nice concrete porch. The grass wasn't freshly cut and it didn't have a three car garage. In fact, it was the complete opposite. It was a cream colored house in a run-down neighborhood. The streets were full of trash, the stop signs had graffiti on them and almost every house had a piece of wood or plastic where a window once was. It was a rough neighborhood and Trent's house fit in perfectly. From the outside it looked as if no one lived there. The mold on the siding looked as if someone had thrown up all over the house. Instead of the cream color it was a nasty green. There was a rusty orange old Ford truck sitting in the two car driveway. The grass hadn't been cut in ages. As you walked to the door of the house the grass would tickle your upper shin. The porch was a little slab of wood. The first step was broken and the screen door to the

house didn't stay shut. The only way you could tell someone lived there was the bike in the front yard.

The house was no mansion but it was still my comfort spot. The house knew all my secrets, held all my tears, heard all my laughs and saw all my smiles. During this time in my life I was losing a lot of people. No one thought I should be with Trent, so everyone who I thought I had, left. I would go to school and not have anyone to talk to. Even at home my family was becoming distant. I couldn't handle it all, so eventually I moved in with Trent.

The house was very empty. Trent's didn't have a lot of nice things ,but they did have this couch. It was just a plain beige colored sofa. It matched the colors of the empty walls and matched the beige stained carpets. The couch and a table were the only furniture that they had. They didn't need a lot. They welcomed me in with open arms and the first place I sat was on that couch. I would go home after school every day and sit on the couch and talk about my day. I would find comfort in all the words Trent told me. If I was having a bad day he would hold me in his arms and let me cry on that couch. He would tell me, "I love you Kirsten and I will never leave you like they left you. It is me and you against the world now." I believed him. The house was my escape away from all my troubles. It was my safe zone. It was where I always wanted to be when I wasn't there.

The house didn't stay my comfort spot for very long. It soon started testing everything that I stood for and thought I believed in. I grew up in the church, and thought I was very strong in my faith. I thought I could stand up to anyone or say no to anything whenever I didn't want to do something. Trent took away my

strength; Trent was my weakness. People are only who they pretend to be for a few weeks and then the real person comes out. The real Trent wasn't the person I thought he was.

One day after school I came home early because I was sick. There were cars I didn't recognize parked on the side of the road. I started getting this weird feeling in my stomach. I knew something wasn't right and I was scared to walk in. I stood on the porch and gained up enough courage to walk into the house. I opened up the wooden door and looked straight into Trent's hazel eyes. We locked eyes and his face turned an odd pale color that I have never seen before. His expression went blank and he grabbed his dark brown hair with his hands and tugged on it. "Why the hell are you home? Shouldn't you be in school right now?" he asked very harshly. "I wasn't feeling very good and I just wanted to come home and relax. Who are all these people?" I asked. He didn't even give me time to take three steps in. He ran over, grabbed my arm with force and escorted me into his room. He then proceeded to tell me that I had to stay there until he was done with his "business." I sat in that room on the bed and didn't move for 15 minutes. He came into the room and sat down

stay there until he was done with his "business." I sat in that room on the bed and didn't move for 15 minutes. He came into the room and sat down on the bed next to me and didn't say anything. The tension was so thick I felt like a fifty pound weight was on my chest. Then finally after what felt like an eternity he said, "Things are going to start changing around here. You are going to start helping me sell and if you don't, you are going to need to find a new boyfriend and a new place to live." It took me a while to soak it

all in. I didn't want a new boyfriend and I had no place to stay. I needed him and I needed this house. I was at battle with myself and I had no idea what I was going to do. I always told myself that I wanted nothing to do with drugs or anyone who did drugs. Eventually I decided I was going to do what I had to do to keep Trent and the house.

I told Trent that I would sell and everything started going downhill from there. I started using and was doing everything he told me to. I didn't have the strength to say no to him anymore. I didn't know what I believed in anymore. If I didn't sell what I was supposed to, he would make me sleep outside, and if I did say no and upset him I would get hit. I had become his slave. I would have sex with him so I was able to get drugs and not have to buy them. He started controlling everything I did. He picked out my clothes, checked my gas mileage, checked my phone history, and told me who I could and couldn't hang out with. I was play dough in his hand. I had lost all my strength and my morals. I found strength in him and still I continued to feel like as long as I stayed in that house everything eventually was going to be okay.

It went on like this for two years. I wasn't Kirsten anymore. I was Trent's girl. One month something happened and it hit me like a pound of bricks. It showed me that I didn't need this or want anything to do with this anymore. It was Trent's birthday and I had the whole day planned. His mom and I decorated the house. We put up one banner above his bedroom door and 17 balloons. It wasn't a lot of decorations but it was something. When we were finished I walked into his bed room and I unpinned the sheet he had thumbtacked to the window. The sun beat in and lit up the room. Once the sun hit his eyes he

pulled the blanket over his face and mumbled a few curse words at me. I didn't take any offense because he stayed out late last night and probably had a hangover. After a few moments he reluctantly got out of bed. He wasn't surprised by the decorations; he looked agitated by them. I grabbed his arm and turned him around "Happy Birthday" I said as I planted a kiss on him. He kissed back and gave me a little smile. That was the face I fell in love with. It was so soft and gentle. All the tattoos and piercings he had didn't matter when he was looking at me like that. "I have a whole day planned for us, babe," I said with excitement! "I don't want to go anywhere today, Baby. I just want to stay home," he said. I was a little hurt but then again it was his birthday. His mom had her boyfriend come over and a few friends. We were all just sitting around smoking and talking about life. We sat there for two hours telling stories and enjoying each other's company.

Then everything changed in a blink of an eye. A loud thud was at the door. Trent looked out the window and yelled, "SHIT, the police are here!" James, Trent's mom's boyfriend, took off toward the back of the house and everyone started scrambling trying to hide the weed and put the pills away. The guys at the door didn't wait for someone to answer it. They just forced their way on in. One guy ran around the back of the house. No one in the house moved. I was so confused as to what was going on. I grabbed Trent's hand for security. I heard Michelle, Trent's mom, scream, "They got him." Instantly everyone ran outside. James was in handcuffs and was getting put into the back of the car. Michelle tried to reach for him and started sobbing about how much she loved him and needed him.

Trent started trying to act tough and started running his mouth. They didn't care what anyone had to say. They loaded him up and left.

After a couple hours everyone had calmed down. Michelle had fallen asleep and everyone else had left. Trent and I were just sitting there. Everything that had happened was a blur. I needed clarity.

"What happened?" I asked Trent. He took in a deep breath and said "James is a fugitive. We have been hiding him for about 6 months. Those guys were bounty hunters and took him away. We can be in some serious trouble for this." "You knew he was a fugitive and still let me stay here with you? How could you put me in danger like that? I thought you cared about me," I retaliated. Trent didn't even look upset he just looked at me and pointed to the door. I knew at that moment that I didn't want anything to do with this life. I was ready to walk away and leave this house.

Even though the house was my comfort spot, tested my strength and showed me what life I didn't want it still impacted me. The events that happened during my time in this house showed me what life was really like. The house made me the person I am today. I wouldn't want to experience any of those events again in my life, but I wouldn't take them back for anything in the world. The house is a part of my past that led me to my present.

The Hatred that Opens Minds

Kirsten Olsson



The earliest memories of my mom include her doing an activity with a book in her hand and if she didn't have a book in her hand it was close by. She lined the walls of our house with bookcases full of books, magazines, encyclopedias, or dictionaries. Books were everywhere you looked in our house, behind the couch, below the lamps, under the sinks, in cabinets, in bedrooms or hidden in the most random of spots. My mother had a strong love for books and she did her best to pass that on to her children. My mother achieved her goal in three out of four of her kids. I, however, did not pick up the love for reading that my mother tried to engrain in me. To me reading was boring and I could never understand how anyone could be so involved with a fictional character, but even though I never understood the love of reading the few books I did read opened my mind up. By reading "The Lonely Good Company of Books" by Richard Rodriguez and "Learning to Write" by Russell Baker it shows how even though you "hate" something, positive events can come from it.

In the essay "The Lonely Good Company of Books" Rodriguez tells the readers how he never understood why everyone wanted to read. Rodriguez grew up in a house where reading was not pushed up-

on him. For example he says "For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible" (293). In other words, he is showing us the reason why he never wanted to read books. He never saw anyone close to him enjoy it, so he thought he wouldn't be able to enjoy it also. My mother was the complete opposite of Rodriguez' parents, but I was not. My mother loved to read almost as much as she loved each of us kids, but I, like Rodriguez, couldn't quite understand why until one moment. For Rodriguez, his moment was in a reading class with his nun. "I sat there and sensed for the very first time some possibility of fellowship between a reader and a writer, a communication, never intimate like that I heard spoken words at home convey, but one nonetheless personal" (294). This was his moment when he finally understood what reading could do to a reader. My moment was in my freshman English class. We were put into reading circles and our teacher assigned us a book to read over the month. The book that my group was assigned was called Jude. I dreaded this assignment. I hated reading and I thought there wasn't a book out there that was going to prove me wrong. I took the book home that night and decided I was going to hurry and read it so I didn't have to stress about it anymore. I sat down on the couch, curled up with a blanket, got all comfortable like I used to see my mom do and started reading. I started and finished that book in a matter of two hours. Once I closed the cover I looked at my mom and said "I love this book!" The author drew me so deep into the book that I felt as though I was experiencing everything Jude went through. I hurt when he hurt, I cried when he cried, laughed when he laughed, and was sad

when he was sad. Reading this book was my moment that I realized what reading could do for me.

After Rodriguez' moment he continued to read more and more books. He started reading books above his level and pushing himself. In the text Rodriguez states, "In these various ways, books brought me academic success as I hoped that they would." (296). Rodriguez understood why in schools posters were all about reading and why teachers stressed reading. Reading opens many doors and fills your mind with ideas. Just like Rodriguez after my moment I continued to read more books in the same genre as Jude. I fell in love with the story line of a youth living a troubled life with a bad family, in a rough neighborhood, experiencing guns and violence. While I was reading these stories I always caught myself thinking of how I could help these characters. I would always think of ideas and what the outcome would be if they listened to my ideas. These books opened my mind to many opportunities. I figured out that with my life I wanted to actually help kids in these situations. I didn't want it to be just an idea anymore. I wanted my ideas to be action.

I always felt as if I owed my English teachers more appreciation than what I had given them. Not only do they have to teach us but they also try to instill in us the love of reading and writing. It isn't a very easy task to accomplish when you are dealing with high school students. In his essay "Learning to Write" Baker had a teacher who tried to do just that. He tried to instill in them his passion but didn't convey it in the right manner. Just like Baker I also had a teacher who tried to instill in me her passion for reading and writing. My sophomore English teacher was a very perky woman. She was very

tall and slender. Whenever she took a step it was as if she was floating. She was very gentle with her steps and glided about the class room. She had the soft quiet voice, the one your mom gets when she reads you a bedtime story. I never saw her angry. She was always smiling and even when she did get upset she would just laugh. She believed that laughter was the best medicine.

Even though Baker and I both had teachers who tried to show us what reading and writing could do for us; we both didn't take hook, line and sinker. We still had our topics we weren't fond of. In the story, "Learning to Write" the students had to write an essay at the end of the year. They were assigned to write an informal essay. Baker says "Of all forms or writing, none seemed so boring as they essay." (268). In other words, he did not think that he was going to do well over this essay. Baker thought the essay was going to be very boring. Baker didn't like the format and didn't think that he was going to be able to find anything to write about. Like Baker when my teacher introduced us to the poetry unit I thought the same thing. I thought I was going to be absolutely horrible at this part and everyone was going to make fun of me. Baker and I both thought that what we wrote wasn't going to mean anything and we couldn't wait to get it over with. Even though I didn't want to do the unit like Baker's situation it was a required part of the class.

Pushing through what you think you might hate may bring positive events into your life. In the essay Baker writes "And he started to read. My words! He was reading my words out loud to the entire class. What's more is the entire class was listening. Listening attentively." (269). He was so shocked to hear his essay be-

ing read aloud because he felt that he had done it wrong and it wouldn't live up to the teachers expectations. I understand why Russell Baker was startled when his essay started being read. He was uneasy when he turned the essay in. The feeling he got that day when his essay was being read can never be replaced. Baker says "I did my best to avoid showing my pleasure, but what I was feeling was pure ecstasy at this startling demonstration that my words had the power to make people laugh" (269). I have felt Baker's feeling of pure ecstasy before. During our poetry unit I submitted a poem to the teacher. I wasn't quite sure how she was going to receive it. It didn't fit the exact outline of what my teacher gave to us. The next day I was sitting at my desk and she swiftly walked over to me and bent down by my desk. My heart started pounding. My palms were sweating. I was nervous. She placed the poem upside down on my desk and waited for me to look at it. I grabbed the left corner of the paper and peeled it up slowly. I wasn't quite sure what I was looking for, maybe a lot of red pen marks, but I didn't see anything. I flipped it over and written on a post-it note was a question that read "Would you be willing to let me publish this in the school paper?" At first I didn't believe it! I had to look at the note again and again. This was real! I then looked at her and shook my head yes and she grabbed my poem. The next time I read the poem it was in the school newspaper the next week. Everyone loved my poem. I started thinking to myself maybe I am not so bad at this poetry stuff. I was surprised that I actually enjoyed expressing my feelings. It gave me a sense of comfort. I now write poems for friends on Valentine's Day, Christmas, or whenever I just need an escape from life.

Through the readings of "The Lonely Good Company of Books" and "Learning to Write" I saw how my hatred had influenced my life and lead to positive events. I now have a career due to the books I read and I now have an escape whenever life becomes too much. I wasn't appreciating everything that it was doing for me because I couldn't let something I hated do so much for me. As a society if we don't like something we automatically shut it out. We need to work on opening our options because we never know what each thing has in store for us. I used to also shut it out, but now I have a life direction to thank for it.

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Unregistered

Mitchell Pierson



Between the 1850's and the 1920's a huge number of Indian children were rounded up by white Americans and herded onto what became known as the Indian Boarding School Movement. (Assimilation Through Education) For many, it erased a heritage that was rightfully theirs. For me, growing up white was not everything that it's cracked up to be when I felt that I was missing out on a cultural background that should be mine. Although my great grandmother was of full Native American decent, she was never registered with any tribe due to being sent to a boarding school as a child and having her heritage erased in an act of assimilation. With very little information being passed down by my grandmother, it has been difficult to embrace my true heritage. Like Richard Rodriguez wrote in his essay, *On Becoming Chicano*, "Partly because I had no way of comprehending my racial identity except in this technical sense, I gave up long ago the cultural consequences of being a Chicano." (169) I identify with Rodriguez as I, too, will only be able to comprehend my racial identity in a technical sense. For me, desiring the knowledge and longing for that part of my heritage has made me feel like an outsider and robbed of the diverse cultural background that I should have rightfully called mine.

To someone that doesn't know me,

my childhood would have looked like the average stereotypical "status quo" American life. I lived in a small town community in a home with two parents, and I attended a Southern Baptist Church. I played soccer, football, baseball and basketball and swam in the local country club swimming pool all summer. I had many friends that were white and lived the white lifestyle. We all attended the same public school, listened to the same lectures by our teachers, and sat through the same sermons every Sunday morning. In many ways, I looked to everyone like the All American boy in my "status quo" life. That is what appears on the outside and what is visible to others. But on the inside, I've never felt like the average "status quo" American boy because I know that part of me is Cherokee.

When I was young, it didn't seem to be such a big part of my identity. It wasn't until I became a young adult that I began to grieve for what I felt I had sorely missed and might never be able to find. I do wish that I was able to actually live in that culture and be able to submerge myself in that lifestyle. There is a large community of Native Americans in my town and I have asked them why so many Native Americans are only partially able to claim their heritage. I have learned that at the Indian Boarding Schools students were completely assimilated into a "status quo" American lifestyle and were taught to set aside their Native American background and customs. I've also learned that possibly some of the customs inside my home were not as far removed from my Cherokee culture as I had at first thought.

One of the first things that I learned was how the Cherokee are a matriarchal society. The heritage of the individual comes from the mother's side of

the family. The mother of the Cherokee family basically runs her own home. This initially happened because the men were warriors who might have left the home and been killed in battle. Instead of the family having to leave their home, the woman always provided and cared for the home. Interestingly, this occurred in my own life as my father was on the road a lot for his job. It became more obvious after his death when I was two that my mother would raise me and my sister along with doing everything to run that home.

Cherokee people also believed in a tribe raising the child. I was pretty much raised by a group of men that provided me with a father figure in my life. I learned to listen to the stories of the elder men and had many “father” figures that helped shape me into the man I am today. I learned what it takes to be a father and what type of father I hope to be tossing baseballs and catching pop flies with my best friend’s dad. He became a mentor to me as I was always able to turn to him and ask for a “father’s” advice.

As with all other tribes, hunting and gathering is another Cherokee custom. I feel like I also take on this cultural attribute. I was taught to hunt and to respect the land and the animals that provide food for us. I learned to garden and to store food for winter months. Since there are so many restrictions on hunting and trapping game, we are not able to hunt for all of the meat like past generations. In the same sense, I try to get some deer meat every year so that our family is not forced to spend as much money on getting poultry and beef.

I have also been taught to respect others and not force judgment or opinions on others. I have been taught that this is an Indian custom that is very apparent in

my home. I have never been told what I must do and given ultimatums to do it. As Robert Frost wrote in his poem, *The Road Not Taken*, “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both and be one traveler”, I was taught through parables like this that two distinct paths emerge, but I can only choose one. I am taught to respect others in the same way. This, from what I am told, is one of the most important cultural traditions that Cherokee elders teach their children.

There were several characteristics that I could have chosen to write about but I felt this would best help describe what I feel is my identity today. Yes, I never was truly in what was considered the registered Native American lifestyle but in the same sense I felt like some of the cultural background that I thought that I had lost, not being registered, was truly taught to me in a different way. Did I really lose what I thought was being Cherokee or did I just learn it from something different than a true Cherokee tribe? If someone were to actually look into my childhood, they wouldn’t see the stereo-typical American lifestyle, they would actually see a part Cherokee who found his own kind of tribe and was taught some of the cultural background that he thought he had lost.

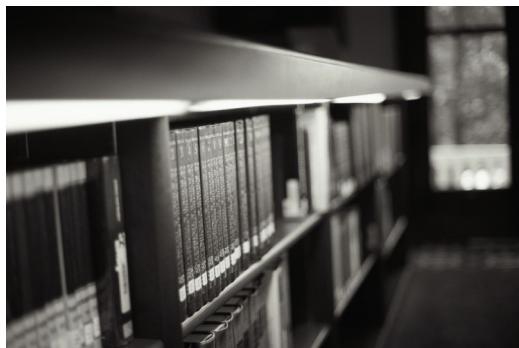
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Learning with Struggles

Sachith Polpitya-Hrachchige



I was brought up in an environment where education seemed to be a dream. I was born in a small country called Sri Lanka, which is located at the tip of India. It is so small that no one would bother to look at it. In Sri Lanka the adult literacy rate is very poor; 90% of the people are not educated, mainly because of the education system. My parents are also not literate; they struggle with writing and reading. I didn't know how to read and write until I attended school when I was 8 years old. However, after beginning school my reading experience was similar to the essays, "One Writer's Beginnings," by Eudora Welty and "The Love of Books," by Gloria Naylor, whereas my writing experiences were like Russell Baker's essay "Learning to Write" and "How I Learned to Read and Write," by Fredrick Douglas. Even though I was not brought up in an environment of books, and the resources available in the country were limited, the struggles when learning to read and write made me understand the importance of reading and writing.

Because I was not brought up in an environment full of books, I did not know how to read before school started. According to Welty, "Neither of my parents had come from homes that could afford to buy many books..." (182). Likewise, my

parents were also from poor families from a third world country. Welty explains that her parents brought in books to the house, even though it put some strain on her parents' salary. Welty's parents thought that children should grow with books. She describes, "Beside the bookcase in the living room, which was always called "the library" there were the encyclopedia tables and dictionary stand under window in our dining room" (182), but when it comes to me, it was the opposite. We never had a library or enough books to read. The main reason that we didn't have a library was because my parents were not literate enough to read books for themselves or to me, whereas Welty's parents were educated enough to read to her. She describes, "I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house at any time of the day was there to read in or to be read to. My mother read to me .She'd read to me in the big bedroom in the morning..." (Welty 182). Unlike Welty, who experienced teaching from her parents, and learned from an environment where books were read to her, a childhood environment for me to fall in love with books was way out of my reach.

Even though the environment which I grew up in was not a book house, learning to read and the love for books was my desire. I didn't know how to read before school started. Since my parents struggled to read, I was not in love with books because I was not read to by my parents. After starting school, books interfered with my life. There were particular books to be read at school and except for those books there was no option for us to choose books that we would love to read. My experience in reading was similar to the essay, "The Love of Books," by Gloria Naylor. Naylor discusses that her

mother loved books, she states, "She was not allowed to use the public libraries; and purchasing books was out of the question" (226). Here she discusses the difficulties that her mother faced to access books.

It was quite the same for me, since Sri Lanka has a poor education system. Junior schools in Sri Lanka didn't have libraries for students to refer to except for the higher classes. At that time my parents hadn't been to school, and were not educated enough to think that books were the rich gold that makes you rich in education. Instead, they thought it was the school which was needed to assist a person to be educated.

The school was needed to assist me in the correct path, but it was lacking resources. Money was raised for the school, but it was not enough to afford all the facilities for the students. In the essay, "How I Learned to Read and Write," by Frederick Douglas, he discusses the facilities he had during the time he was struggling to learn. Douglas states, "During this time, my copy book was the board fence, brick wall and the pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk, with these I learned mainly to read and write" (142). My experience in learning to write at junior school was similar to Douglas. We didn't have proper desks or chairs to work comfortably. I would have to sit on the red floor and write on the floor keeping my back curled, which later caused me a back pain. The classroom had a blackboard with some pieces of chalk. There were not many books available for us to read except the books that were intended to read for the particular grade, which most of the students didn't enjoy. However, it was my pleasure to read something new even though I didn't love it. Despite the poor condition of the school, I wanted to en-

hance my skills in both in reading and writing. After reaching an acceptable level, I had a language problem. Because I switched to English, my struggles to read and write were enhanced further.

Learning to read and write in school was very difficult, especially when learning two languages. During my school life, I had to attend two schools and the languages at the schools were different. Since I was born in a Sinhalese country and I was brought up in a Sinhalese family, I was first sent to a public school for kindergarten and junior school. During the time I attended junior school, I was taught in a language called Sinhala, which is the native language in Sri Lanka. It was a difficult language to learn at the beginning. I struggled in learning to read in the first two years and then it started getting easier. Later, I was sent to an international high school in Sri Lanka, which was a sudden change in my life. I felt like a person struggling with blindness. After changing the school I felt I had been dropped off a cliff to end up nowhere. I felt like this because the school used a new language, which was called English. I did have some previous knowledge at junior school, but not a fraction of what I mastered in my native language. Even though I had to walk in the blindness, my desire to be successful in reading and writing never ended. I thought it was an opportunity that I had been given by God. I was able to read and write in English at first but not to an acceptable level. My curiosity grew strongly. I struggled throughout years and years of reading any book which showed up and I started writing essays whenever I was free. This was similar to the essay, "Learning to Write," where Baker discusses that his teacher believed the essence of writing was important. He

used a direct quote to show what his teacher had said in class. "Mrs. Fleagle said, "The purpose of the porter's scene, boys, is to provide comic relief from the horror, don't you see" (219). Baker believes that writing could be done in many ways, but the basic importance of writing is to write what you feel from the bottom of your heart. In comparison, my belief was that whatever I do will be insignificant, but it was very important to me that I did it. I worked so hard and wrote several essays. One of these essays turned out to be a valid life time memory.

My struggles weakened when I wrote a valid piece of paper. During the last year of high school, I was assigned to write a descriptive essay for a competition. My writing experience was similar to Russell Baker. In the essay, "Learning to Write," Baker discusses how he was struggling to write an essay to the class and ended up writing the essay, "The Art of Eating Spaghetti" (220). This essay turned out to be successful where Baker wrote all the experiences and feelings that came from the bottom of his heart. Likewise, I was struggling on what to write, but at last I figured out to write about how I felt after I was separated from my family. This essay was named "Breaking up Relationships," it involved my experiences and feelings like Baker used. After submitting the essay to the teacher, Mrs. Angali, the essay was sitting in the back of my mind worrying me. Days passed away and on the second week, Mrs. Angali came to the class with our essays and started distributing the papers. I felt terrible. I was staring at the other student in front of me, while praying inside my mind hoping for a positive comment. By the time I was praying, she finished giving away the essays, but I didn't get mine. I started hearing a stabbing sound. It was my heart

beating so fast that I could hear it. I remained staring, and Mrs. Angila announced that I have three essays to discuss. My mind revised the word "three." I felt that I wasn't the only one who is going to be ashamed. She continued reading all three of the essays and the whole class remained silent and finally Mrs. Angila commented that these essays would be appearing for the competition. I couldn't believe those words. I could not believe that I have overcome my struggles.

The environment in which I grew wasn't suitable for me to learn to read and write, but the struggles I had to read and write made me understand the importance of reading and writing. After struggling for years with difficulties, I was able to overcome. My parents were not educated, which reflected on me negatively. It caused me to be brought up in an environment where no one read to me. After starting school, I started interacting with books. The public junior school, which I attended, was not the kind of school with all the facilities. There was no library. Later I attended an international high school, where I first accessed a library. After attending an international high school I had a huge change in my life. Because, after going from a public junior school to an international high school, I had a language problem. This was because I had to switch languages from Sinhala to English, and I felt like I was struggling with blindness. But with all the difficulties I worked hard because I knew the importance of learning to read and write. My determination to be successful made me overcome my struggles.

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The Freedom Education Brings

Timmika Ross



In today's society books are tangible to anyone who's willing to read them. Whether you're passing through the mall or stopping at the grocery store, books are not far from your reach but do Americans take advantage of this luxury? No. As technology gets more advanced people turn to videos and to the internet for their entertainment. Especially, African American men. According to Tavis Smiley Reports, 69 percent of black men have not taken out the time read a whole book due to lack of time because there working or interest. What these black men don't know is that back in the 1800's slaves were risking their lives to be able to read and write. Slaves were considered inferior to their white masters and being able to read or write made them equals which was the last thing their masters wanted. Owners also feared that with the knowledge slaves would figure out that they had rights. So in return slaves who were caught reading or writing were punished with harsh whippings and beating, amputation of hands or feet, and in extreme situations death. Knowing the consequences, few slaves still felt it was necessary to learn how to read and write even if it meant their lives. This is true in "How I Learned to Read and Write" by

Fredrick Douglas. Douglas makes a decision to learn how to read and write despite his master's orders not to in order to gain insight on things he never knew before. I will be comparing Douglas's hard road to knowledge to my experiences with reading and writing throughout my life. Although I had the resources I needed to succeed in school I took them for granted and eventually forced to realize that my failure to take education seriously would lead to my demise.

At a young age Fredrick Douglas had to determine if he was content with being an uneducated slave or would he risk his life to be something better than what his master wanted him to be. After Mr. Auld, Douglas's master, found him getting taught his ABC's by Mrs. Auld he said "Learning would spoil the best nigger in the world. Now if you teach that nigger how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master." (Douglas 270). Douglas was forced not to continue his education because he was labeled as slave and was expected to act as such. But Douglas felt as though that his journey to accomplish what he need to was not stopped but deferred. He knew the difficulty of learning without a teacher but was determined to because he knew the importance of knowledge. Knowledge was freedom. At the Hugh's home, Douglas thought he found a friend in Mrs. Hugh because he treated him like a human being. But when she saw him with a newspaper she became even fiercer than her husband who forbade Douglas to learn. Douglas said, "From this time I was most narrowly watched. If I was in a separate room any considerable length of time, I was sure to be suspected of having a book, and was at once called

to give an account of myself. All this, however was too late. The first step had been taken. Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the inch, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the ell" (Douglas 272). Despite all of their efforts to keep him from prospering is not working and that he's been given a lead way to education and now he's going to do all he can to finish what he has set out to do. Douglas found other methods to learn like recruiting homeless white boys to give him lessons in exchanged for food. He says "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 teacher. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeed in learning to read" (Douglas 272). This quotes show Douglas determination to learn. By those little boys, being white they could have easily told on him and he could have been dead but he was willing to make that big decision to trust them because he knew all the knowledge they held and that it could benefit him.

While on his venture towards knowledge Douglas found out that "slavery" was trap that whites set up for blacks and if you looked at the bottom line of things he had just as a right as they did to be free and Independent. While contemplating his position in life as a slave Douglas at twelve years old stumbled upon "The Columbian Orator". This book changed Douglas's mind set of what the relationship between a master and a slave should be saying that "The moral which I gained from the dialogue was the power of utterance. What I got from Sheridan was a bold denunciation of slavery, and a powerful vindication of human rights. The more I read, the

more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers" (Douglas 273). Douglas understands that all slave holders have some amount of guilt within them for participating in this immoral act of imprisonment of another human being. But although he feel some pride in knowing that he has more rights than he was lead to believe he is also in pain because he feels he's living a life that is not made for him and by not rebelling he is settling with something that should have never been. To know you are destined for better but not able to live up to your full potential could break the strongest person.

During his trip on the wharf of Mr. Waters Douglas seen two I Irishmen unloading stone and proceeded to help them with their duty, unasked. As they finished the Irishmen Proceeded to ask Douglas was he a slave for life and in response Douglas declared that he was. With pity and melancholy they told him to run to the north and friends there so he and the other slaves could be free. Douglas was of course cautioned by their kindheartedness saying "White men have been known to encourage slaves to escape, and then, to get the reward, catch them and return them to their masters. I was afraid that these seemingly good men might use me so; besides, I wished to learn how to write, as I might have occasion to write my own pass" (Douglas 275). Douglas is truly committed to being considered among those who can say they can read and write. He is not willing to take a chance of untimely freedom that could potentially stray him from his goal to learn the required skills he needs so he can one day write about his own life as a slave. Fortunately his job at Durgin and Bailey's ship-yard assisted with his ongoing process to read and write. Douglas would read the ship car-

penters and write on the timber the name of what part of the ship it was to go to. Soon he was able to write four letters. In addition Douglas cleverly persuades a boy who could write to also teach him without him knowing. Douglas said "I would tell him I could write as well as he. The next word would be, "I don't believe you. Let me see you try it". I would then make the letters which I had been so fortunate as to learn, and ask him to beat that. In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way" (Douglas 275). Douglas manipulated any opportunity he could to use it as a learning experience so he could gradually get to where he needed to be. After learning all these practices a few years later Douglas accomplished his goal to learning how to read and write. After becoming free he has gone on to making history making strides like being one of the greatest African American speakers, fought for equal voting right, and working under Abraham Lincoln during the civil war. Fredrick Douglas's life is a true tell all story of how hard it was for slaves to be get ahead in life and be able to participate in reading and writing. He has gone through so much to reach his goal and will forever be a leading representation of what black slaves had to go through in the 18th century and how determination is the key to achieve all your aspirations. As for me, my expedition towards learning was extremely less hectic than Douglas's because I had the tools and the support I needed to succeed. It all started in kindergarten. I went to Peabody elementary school and fortunately for me my mother was a part time teacher there who took it upon herself to make sure I was ahead of the game when it came to what I knew academically. She taught me simple

words, my ABC's, my colors, and simple math. These lessons my mother bestowed upon me made the transition from kindergarten to first grade an easy one. In Contrast, at that point in Douglas's life he was being slung around in hard labors of being a slave and didn't fathom the thought of learning let alone something as simple as the ABC's. From first grade to the fifth, I accumulated years' worth of knowledge that I give credit to my great teachers. One in particular was my fifth grade Mrs. Schuler. She always kept an eye on me in class and stepped in when she felt I needed some extra attention. I can remember one time in particular when I struggled learning how photosynthesis worked. She sat down and explained to me step by step how the sun produces energy for the plant by making food (glucose) so the plant could grow. From then on I took great pride in finally learning how this scientific process worked and not only that I learned that if I needed help I should ask for it because it's better to ask questions than to be left in the dark. Growing up I was assigned to teachers who cared about my progression in school which is what Douglas didn't have the pleasure of having. Instead of people encouraging him to learn and to do better he was constantly told to stop trying to learn because it would only cause him injury. This is proven when his master Mr. Auld tells his wife "If you teach that nigger how to read he would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm" (270). Douglas is getting denied something that was most precious to slaves back then which was the chance understand the world around him.

High School was a time in my life that I realized that what I was learning

was no longer for my enjoyment but what was necessary in order for me to move along. To achieve the goal that millions of American teenagers where striving for as well which was a diploma. In high school the lease that was tied around my neck was now gone because I was expected to act as a young adult who was responsible for my own achievement and failures.

With that freedom I foolishly took for granted the opportunities I had to learn new things every day. Freshman and Sophomore year I felt it wasn't crucial for me to come to school every day or take test and quizzes seriously because this was my time to hang out and do things that teenagers do not caring what the result would be like at the end. I was content with the way I treated school until my principal called me to his office a month before summer break. He told me that my grades are not measuring up to the grades I received in middle school. He proceeded to tell me that if I kept going in the path I was going that I would not fail several classes and potentially not walk across the stage with my class while spending an extra semester in high school to get back on track. I was disappointed in myself because I knew I could be doing better than I was allowing myself to do. Especially when slaves had to work ten times as hard as I did to obtain any ounce of information they could. I was abusing the right that my ancestors, including Fredrick Douglas, fought for and in many circumstances tragically died for. After that talk, I left his office with aspirations that was as big as the sky. Junior and senior year I strived hard to get praise worthy grades that would indeed impress any college I was interested in. When classes got tough, I never lost in mind what my initial goal was which was to graduate. Graduation was

one of the proudest moments in my life. Seeing my family in the stands while surrounded by my peers, some I knew since elementary, I felt that the hard work I had to endure to get to this point was worth it and much more. Following my ceremony, I was accepted to Missouri Western State University, being the first person in my family to attend a University was a joy I couldn't explain. Even though my choice to learn wasn't a life or death decision like it was for Douglas I still feel that my education was something that was earned and now that I know how easy I have it compared to back then I will seize every chance I can absorb new information.

Fredrick Douglas's story "How I Learned to Read and Write" should really make us think how important education is and how much do we value it. He has conquered any obstacle that has tried to delay his learning process and with lack of motivation he always stayed strong minded to what he believed in. In this generation teenagers couldn't withstand half of the things Douglas had gone through to get the education that is offered to them on a silver platter. I feel that we should treat school as a gateway to success in life and appreciate it for what it is because opportunities we are given now are golden compared to the ones given hundreds of years ago. Yes, school can be tiring and stressful sometimes but there's no better feeling than to say that you worked hard to get to where you are in life because that made you a strong person with determination and longevity.

A Mother's Word

Timmika Ross



Each month has an event or holiday that symbolizes its place in the year. November is known for Thanksgiving and December for Christmas, May is especially known for Mother's Day. A day where millions celebrate the person who brought them into the world, cared, and nurtured them to the person they are today. A mom, at least a respectable one, teaches you the essentials of right and wrong, she gives useful advice that sticks with you all your life, and with that advice they guide you down the right path in hopes that you live up to all your dreams. My mother, Jackie Lavett Brown, not only defines what a mother should be but also what a woman should be which is strong and confident. And for this reason she has been the leading influence in my life.

Her smile could warm up the coldest day but with that gentle presence, came a snappy attitude. She would get my sibling's and I attention with a single finger snap and demanded that we carefully listen to what she had to say. At a young age, I realized that whatever knowledge my mother brought upon me would be useful in some part of my life. My mother taught me several things that

assisted me on my journey to being independent. This journey began when I was 7. I can remember ironing a shirt for school for the first time and struggling because I wasn't able to iron the long sleeves properly with the rest of the shirt. My mom walked over and calmly said, "You have to iron the sleeves first before you iron the rest of the shirt it makes it much easier." After the shirts came pants and soon I was ironing everything in my closet. That situation was one of the many little lessons my mom shared with me. As I got older my lessons became more directed toward the real world. Like when she showed me how to catch the bus to the dentist. She said I was becoming too old for her to still be attending my appointments, so she showed me how to get there by pointing out stops and familiar places so I would know if I'm going in the right direction or not. On my next appointments, I was going solo. I was scared going on my own, fearing I would get lost but she reassured me that I would be fine. On my way back home, teeth pounding and jaw numb, I couldn't wait to let her in on the day's events. After I excitedly told her the story, her laugh let me know that she was proud of me. My mom even taught me how to pay a bill but it was hard for me to think I was accomplishing anything because I was using her money but nonetheless neither of my friends knew how to do it so I felt ahead of the game. My mom has always taken it upon herself to teach me things she felt I needed to learn and I never shut down a chance to acquire something new.

While growing up it's normal to make mistakes but with making mistakes it's always important to learn from them. After going through my countless mistakes, my mom always had valuable ad-

vice that would make me look at my mistake at a “you live and you learn” stand point. Similar to when I got caught stealing with my best friend in 5th grade. After I received my punishment in the shape of a belt, she proceeded to say, “Never be weak minded, because then people can get you to do anything.” I knew the reason I stole was because my best friend told me to and hearing those words helped me to realize that not having an opinion about what I was doing would get me in more trouble than I was ready for. With my failures, came advice from my mother who often repeated advice that she felt fit for the occasion. It was the “Speak up for yourself because I won’t always be around to do it for you” one when I let a cashier short change me by 3 dollars. And the “Pay attention to what you’re doing and quit getting’ distracted so easily cause in the blink of an eye something can happen” when I got completely lost on my way to my friend’s house and ended up having to call my dad to come pick me up around 10 o’clock at night. My mom was determined for me to learn from my mistakes so I wouldn’t make them again on my path to becoming independent. Also, at an early age my mom knew I was destined for greatness which is why she did her best to keep me focused on my goals and away from those who would try to convince me to do the wrong things. In middle school, I hung around a lot of people who were far from angels and as I became closer and closer to them their bad habits started to wear off on me. I came to realize that I wasn’t supposed to be with this crowd when I got blamed for something I had no part of. Often, as a joke, my friends would quickly pinch the necks of several defenseless students and run away and then watch their reaction from a far. I didn’t participate in

this taunting game but I will admit to laughing, silently, on a few occasions. After constant complaints came crashing in on the principal, he finally decided to do something about it. He narrowed the suspects down to my group of friends and since I was a part of that group I was guilty by association. The principal threatened me with at least 10 days of in school suspension if I didn’t confess. Luckily the situation was cleared up by my ruthless mother and on the ride home she forbid me to hang out with those kids again. At the time I was furious at her for taking all my friends away but now I know it was for the best because all those friends I had are now either in jail or victim to teen pregnancy and unable to finish high school. Also, throughout High School I tried to always live up to the best and smartest in my class and when I wasn’t able to do that I was harder on myself than anyone. When it was time to do ACTs for senior year, all the material I had to study for had me sure I was going to fail it. Many nights I stayed up studying which caused me to miss several days of school. My mom noticed how stressed I was so she got me a tutor. The day of the test I wasn’t as nervous as I was before but I still was a little on edge knowing that this test would be looked upon any college I was interested in going to. “All you can do is your best” was the words my mom said as I walked out the door to take the test. Those words ranged in my head over and over again as I took the two and a half hour test. Although I felt unsure about my score, I was thankful that my mother was able to calm me down enough to be able to get through the test without having a nervous breakdown. Luckily my best was good enough to attend Missouri Western State University. My mom did everything

she could to make sure I made it to college on time with everything I needed. Trying to get all the papers and financial aid done was one task but getting everything I needed for school was another one. With me not having a job, the burden to get all my wants and needs for college was put on my mom. From sheets, to towels, to a vacuum, and new clothes for the fall, she got it all. She sees it as an investment in my future because she knows with the knowledge I'm getting now I will one day be able to pay her back. My mom has always done her best to keep me on the straight and narrow so I'm in a position to accomplish my goals.

I've been tested in many situations to apply what I've learned about making the right decisions from my mother to my everyday life. I can think of a recent situation when I had to choose between what I wanted to do from what I needed to do. Being a freshman in college there were a lot of things I didn't know and one of those things were that I needed to get my books for class that was starting that following Monday. In the midst of the chaos the first few days of college life brought, I didn't consider getting my books until my roommate reminded me. With limited time left, I made a b-line to the bookstore to go pick them up. On my way there a new friend approached me and asked me to go to a dorm activity with her. She told me she would introduce me to some of her friends that were already there and since I knew no one here I didn't want to miss out on an opportunity to meet potential best friends. Although I wanted to go, I let her know that I needed to get my books first. She was persistent in giving me every reason why I should come with her. As soon as I was going to give in I heard a familiar voice in my head saying "Never be weak minded, because then

people can get you to do anything", and at that moment I knew that the decision I was going to make was not a wise one. Walking back with my books, I felt a sense of pride that I made the right decision despite the pressure to do otherwise. This situation is a clear example of why my mother's advice is so useful to me. As a young woman I needed to learn how to stick to what I believed in instead of being persuaded by anyone.

My mother is not the biggest influence in my life just because of the examples I stated already. It's a laundry list of reasons why she has impacted my life more than anyone I've ever and will ever know. But if it wasn't for her advice and the knowledge she instilled in me, I wouldn't be here to tell my story today. Her way of thinking, acting, and loving has been traits that have been passed down from her mother who was the biggest influence in her life. I know now that everything my mom has been teaching me over the years has been in effort to instill those traits that made her such a great person to me. And for that I thank her.

The Power to Change

Timmika Ross



Barack Obama has been praised for being the first African American president ever in the United States. For many he is seen as a testament that if you put your mind to something you can accomplish anything. Unfortunately he does not reflect the millions of Black men in the United States who are clinging to the dangerous streets that Obama strives to protect. According to the Tavis Smiley Reports, 1.46 million black men out of a total voting population of 10.4 million have lost their right to vote due to felony convictions ("Outcomes for Young Black Men", par.4). In the last few decades black men have been a symbol of poverty, crime, and hopelessness. In the same report, he states, in 2007 nearly 6.2 million young black men were school dropouts ("Outcomes for Young Black Men", par.4). From lack of knowledge they are not able to get far in life which is why 53 percent of black men ages 25-34 are either unemployed or make too little to support their family ("Outcomes for Young Black Men", par.4). With slim to no money these men turn to illegal activity in order to get the bare necessities they need which ultimately leads them behind bars. It is an ongoing cycle that has been rotating for decades. For the small few that have been given the chance to do something better with their

life many have been known to resort back to what they know best. The Streets. Although the history of black men is chaotic, I feel that each and every one of these unfortunate men has the personal responsibility and capability to choose a better path for themselves. The decisions they make in the past determines the opportunities they are introduced to in the future. This is true in the book The Other Wes Moore written by Wes Moore. In this book the lives of two young black men sharing the same name are documented in efforts to understand why their journey through life has led them in two totally different fates. Wes #1, the author, has gone off to accomplish a tremendous thing that ultimately has led him to speak in the same arena as our President Barack Obama. While Wes #2 ends up spending life in jail for a murder of a cop during a bank robbery. Throughout this essay, I will be comparing Wes #2 to my older brother Timothy Ross, because both were given an opportunity to accomplish greatness but choosing to stray down a path of negativity.

The hood has been called a playground for young black men and in the case of Wes #2 this is where he feels most comfortable. The hood is where bad choices and negative outlooks on life wonder and continue to corrupt the minds of vulnerable young black men who have nothing else to believe in. Wes has become oblivious to how dangerous his surroundings are because he has grown up around it all his life. As Wes became of age it was clear that he wasn't interested in school, but more fascinated with the fast life in the streets where his older brother, Tony, resides. Tony was in the drug business and even though he made bad decision in his life he was determined to not let Wes

follow in his directions. While contemplating on whether to go to school or skip to hang outside with his friends, Tony called to check up on his mom and little brother. When he senses that Wes was trying to skip yet another day of school he yelled, "Yo, you need to take this shit seriously, man. Acting stupid aint cool!" (Moore 27). With much effort from Tony, Wes wasn't trying to hear what his brother was telling him because he viewed his older brother as somewhat of a hypocrite who did the opposite of what he preached. Wes still wanted the glitz and glamour that came with street life, not knowing what price he would have to pay at the end. A few blocks from his house Wes spotted a kid not much older than him with a pair of headsets from the Janet Jackson "Control" video. Not knowing anyone else with those rare headsets, Wes was interested in finding out how he could get a pair. He approached the boy with a "Hey, where can I get one of those headsets-"(Moore 58). The stranger with the famous headsets replied, "You want one of these, it's pretty easy. All you have to do is wear one, and every time you see jakes roll by, you just push this button and say something. When your shift is over, you come by, and I'll give you your money" (Moore 58). With little convincing, Wes was now appointed as a watch dog for the drug dealers and his duty was to notify them if he was to see any policemen in exchange for money. Wes began his transition into the drug business when he figured out that he could get what he wanted or even desired much faster if he participated in this way of life. This is what lures most young black men into the drug game. They see quick and easy money in their pocket and the more money they receive the less they feel they need school. Years

later Wes was now a high school dropout, with no job training, a young child and living with his Aunt Nicey. In contrast from his mom, Aunt Nicey was strict and stressed from the first day Wes moved into her house that "You need to either get a job or go to school, one of the two, but neither is not an option" (Moore 110). Since going to school was out of the question, Wes decided to create a routine of his own. While in the morning when his Aunt was at work Wes would lounge around the house and leave before she got back, saying that he was "trying to find a job" when he was really checking up on his drug operation. Instead of using what his Aunty is saying as motivation to go out and do something better for himself as a substitute, he decides to become more secretive with his interaction in the drug game. Wes fails to realize that the whole time he had the power to make a life altering decision to get out of his predicament and start a new path for himself. Instead he has used is aunty, who meant no harm but to encourage her nephew to do the right thing, as a crutch to why he has fallen so deep into the drug business. Again, he is not taking responsibility for his actions and blaming those around him for his misfortunes. Although it was illegal, Wes directed his team very well so well that at their peak they could have profited at least four thousand dollars a day. It's Ironic how drug dealers run their operations like real business men, not realizing that with a little education they could be able to accomplish the same amount of money they're making on the streets but in an honest way. These men could use their skill to benefit them without the fear of going to jail but for some young black men just can't see life outside the drug game. This is why they are forever bound to this way of liv-

ing and incapable of effectively using what decent qualities they do have to succeed.

Wes continued this charade on for a while until one day he was faced with reality. "Cheryl, wake up! What the hell is wrong with you?" (Moore 137) is what Wes yelled as he tried to revive the mother of his third and fourth child who was experiencing a drug overdose. With Cheryl being a drug addict and countless convictions under Wes's belt, he knew it was time for him to make a change in the way his life was going. Seeking advice he turned to his friend Levy. Levy was a little bit younger than Wes and was able to leave the hustling game with victory. Levy informed Wes about Job Corps, a program designed to help disadvantaged youth to obtain a general equivalency diploma and skills to help them find a job. The wellbeing of his children and his mother ultimately swayed Wes's decision to attend Job Corps where he excelled tremendously. Wes completed the mandatory placement test at Job Corps and was near the top of his class. Not much later he received his GED in a month and was able to begin working towards his professional training in carpentry. For the past few months in Job Corps Wes gained knowledge and confidence and for the first time he thought he could go in a different direction in his life. He no longer just stayed at Job Corps for his children and his mother he stayed for himself. Wes graduated from Job Corps seven months later and he was eager to put his hard earned training to use. Unfortunately, after continuous temporary gigs that barely paid enough money to feed and clothe his kids, he resorted back to what he knew best, which was the drug game. Soon following, Wes and his brother Tony was sentenced to life in jail after participating in the robbery of a jewelry store

that led to the shooting and killing of a police officer. With much promise in his life I feel that Wes didn't take full advantage of the opportunities he had worked so hard for. When he sees a bump in the road he took the easy way out instead of looking for another way to be successful. His weakness in not taking advantage of Job Corps has resulted in the death of an innocent man and Wes's children without a father. This is unfortunate because the cycle of ruthless judgment making is most likely to continue because his kids don't have a father to look up to for guidance and love. His actions had put him in a predicament that he can no longer get himself out of and he has to face what lies ahead.

Similar to Wes, my brother also went through battles with himself about doing the right thing or resorting back to what he's most familiar with. My brother was born into this world as Timothy Ross Jr. and with the name of my father he has traveling down the same troubling path as he did. From elementary to 7th grade, my brother was on the straight and narrow. He wasn't an A student but he still attended school and did what was needed to in order to get through the day. But in 8th grade that's when he was introduced to the hard life of the streets. He started hanging out with corrupt kids who lived around the way and lost interest in school as well. Every morning my brother's friends would knock on our door and ask what Wes's friends used to ask him "Yo, you coming out today?"(Moore 28). This day to day action infuriated my mother because she knew with that group of people my brother surrounded himself by there was nothing productive going on. They would hang out all day in all night with no conscious about skipping school or lying

to their parents saying that they have been to school. It wasn't long before he started selling drugs. One day my mother got on my brother like Tony got on Wes when he found new shoes in Wes's room and said "Dude, I am going to ask you one more time. Where did you get the money from?"(Moore 69). My mother found new unworn hats and shirts in his closet along with shoes stacked almost to the ceiling. With no job and bad grades coming in, my mother knew there was only one way he was getting these luxuries and it wasn't from her. She ordered him to stop and if he didn't that the consequences he will face in the future will be left to him to get out of. I could tell what she was saying was going in one ear and out the other because he continued to sell drugs which lead to him being arrested for the first time. He called home for help pleading like Wes #1 did when he wanted to come back home from military camp saying, "Ma, I know I haven't been perfect, but I promise to do better. I will pay attention in school and go more often I will clean my room, I will clean your room, and I will-"(Moore 95). My mother treated my brother much like Wes's mother treated him when she flushed his stash of drugs down the toilet that he needed to sell. With annoyance Wes's mother said, "Not only did you lie to me but you were selling drugs and keeping them in my house! Putting all of us in danger because of your stupidity. I don't want to hear your sob story about how much you owe. You will stop selling that stuff. I will be checking your room and I don't want to ever see it in here again. Now get out of my room" (Moore 74). Wes's mother had no remorse for his situation and neither did my mother. She knew that all the wrong my brother was doing would eventually catch up to him.

Luckily, my brother didn't receive any serious charges because he was a minor but that was the turning point for him. He realized that this was his second chance to prove that he is able and willing to do something better with his life.

His epiphany was much like Wes's when he decided that he wanted to do something else with his life. With a horrible attendance record in high school he knew that he would be better off getting a fresh start at Job Corps. He found out by a friend that he would be getting paid a little lump sum each week for attending school which was heaven in my brother's eyes. After a couple of years he graduated as an experienced plasterer and eager to find his niche in this working field. It's has been almost two years since my brother graduated and he still has not put his skill and technique he learned at Job Corps to use. Lack of motivation has directed my brother to the same streets, hanging with the same friends he knew since before his adventure at Job Corps still with no hopes for the future. My brother is a very talented artist, who finds joy in making creative t-shirts for himself and family members, and friends. Although he is encouraged to go back to school and make a business out of his talent he rather sit back and wait in hopes that one day the right person will discover him. My brother has been given countless opportunities to go farther but he is easily discouraged by the little extra effort that is needed for him to accomplish his goals. I feel that's what's wrong with young black men today; they expect opportunities to come to them instead of chasing them down and working hard to pursue their dreams.

In the book The Other Wes Moore Wes #2 states that "We will do what oth-

ers expect of us, If they expect us to graduate, we will graduate. If they expect us to get a job, we will get a job. If they expect us to go to jail, then that's where we will end up too. At some point we lose control" (Moore 126). Wes is basically blaming those who doubted him for the reason he is spending a life sentence at Jessup Correctional Institution. He doesn't blame himself for selling drugs or participating in a robbery that left a policeman dead and several innocent victims scarred for life. I feel that everyone in the world, whether you're a scholar at the most prestigious college in America or just a young boy in the projects, has personal responsibility to do well in life and live up to your potential. Saying that everyone expects them to fail is an excuse that thousands of black men depend on to justify their ruthless and selfish actions. Those same people who expect you to fail can be the gas in your ignition for you to strive harder to prove them wrong. Opportunities come to those who work hard to find them and if these young men continue to blame society for their mishaps then the legacy of black men being a symbol of poverty, crime, and hopelessness will continue for decades to come.

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Morals

Alex Sale



It is common to admire other individuals, so common that it could be considered a characteristic of human nature. Everyone admires someone else in some way. Admirations develop through prominence, success, curiosity, jealousy, respect, motivation, love, influence, or gratitude. My admiration derives from love and gratitude. I am very grateful for the valuable morals my mother has instilled in me. My mother has taught me the significance of honesty, perseverance, and hard work.

Honesty is the first moral my mother had taught me, and arguably the most significant moral she had taught me. "Honesty is the key to success". My mother would often say this to me, usually after a lie I had told had surfaced. When I was younger, I hated when she said that. I had come to the conclusion she was brainwashed by all of the Lifetime movies she watched. It wasn't until I matured that I would come to realize what she was saying was the truth, no pun intended. I am forever grateful that my mother cared enough to teach me this simple lesson. I once lied to my coach about cutting a class in high school, which was a mistake. When my coach confronted my mother about my attendance, the lesson began. My mother made me write my

coach an apology letter stating the truth about what I was doing during that class, furthermore she made me explain that I was not raised to be dishonest. Writing that essay wasn't the only punishment for that incident. I was to do nothing except schoolwork and football for the next month, no hanging out with friends or video games. It may have seemed like the end of the world at the time, but today I am grateful for the punishment. My mother said "all you have is your word, and if your word is no good, you have nothing." Along with honesty, my mother taught me another valuable moral. She taught me to stay persistent in everything I do in life. She always has told me, "It doesn't matter how fast you're moving, as long as you're moving in the right direction." This particular saying didn't irritate me like the honesty cliché did. I suppose it was because when she spoke of perseverance I wasn't in trouble. I have never accepted failure well, in any aspect of life. I remember long car rides home after baseball tournaments that were held out of town. The car rides were even longer when we had lost. I hated losing more than anything in the world. I guess you could say I am a poor sport. I don't just get down on myself when I lose, I get mad. On those long car rides home on hot summer days, the only thing I enjoyed about the situation was the air conditioning blasting on my face. My mother, always trying to make a life lesson out of everything, would preach to me how losing sometimes was good for the soul. Hearing that honestly made me angrier, I often told her to leave me alone. The last thing I wanted to talk about was losing. Still she would say some cheesy quote like, "You have to lose to know how to win". I wanted to find the guy that created that stupid thought and punch him.

Conversely, I knew she was right. I would have another chance to win. Looking back on those situations, I am thankful my mother said those things. Those stupid quotes help mold the beliefs I hold today. She taught me how to stay positive even when I was surrounded by negative. My mother taught me that you have to move forward. She often said there would be obstacles placed in front of me in life that I wasn't going to want to face. She followed by saying, "But you have to face them; you have to put your left foot in front of your right, then your right foot in front of your left, and keep moving forward." Perseverance is steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. My mother has taught me to persevere despite the situation, and continue to do the right things.

Another one of my mother's famous lines is, "Nothing worthwhile is easy". My mother tried to engrave the importance of hard work into my mind as far back as I can remember. I remember her coming home late one evening from a long day of work. This particular day stands out because I remember her being unable to attend my baseball game, and I had to ride with a friend to the game. Being adolescent and curious, I recall asking her what was so important that she had to miss me hit a homerun. She said "I'm sorry, I had a prior obligation". At the time, that didn't mean anything to me. For all I knew a prior obligation was something grownups did for fun. Just as fast as I had interrogated her about her absence during my game, she had gotten out her laptop and started shuffling through some papers. I knew this meant she was about to do what she called work. I wasn't old enough to understand my mother worked in the corporate world. I

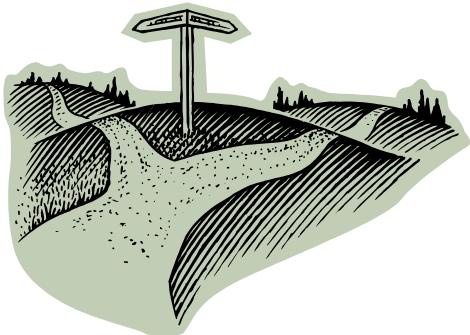
asked her why she always had to work. She quickly responded by saying, "Hard work pays off". I immediately regretted opening my mouth. I knew I was in for another lecture. She asked me what I wanted to do when I grew up. Being young, I responded by saying, I wanted to play major league baseball. She said, " You're never going to play major league baseball unless you work hard, and not just work hard, work harder than everyone else. Just like I will never move up on the totem pole unless I work harder than everyone else, make sense?" At the time I wasn't entirely sure what she was saying, but I nodded in agreement to get the lesson over with. As I got older I started to put moments like those together, and it made perfect sense. I was never going to accomplish anything that I wanted to accomplish unless I worked hard. As I applied hard work to areas in my life it seemed as if I was rewarded in one way or another. For example, once I started applying hard work towards studying, my grades drastically improved. I'm grateful that my mother stressed the importance of hard work.

As I grew older my goals in life shifted. I am no longer a little boy who wants to play major league baseball. I am now a young man who has a goal to attend law school, and become and an attorney. I wouldn't have a chance to accomplish my new goal if it weren't for the valuable morals my mother has taught me. All of her sayings that I disliked growing up eventually grew on me, and I often catch myself reciting them to my friends. My mother's lectures on honesty, perseverance, and hard work play a major role in the way I think today. Those lectures were the building blocks that eventually created my beliefs and goals. I am very grateful for the qualities my mother has helped me pos-

sess. These qualities are the major contributing factors that ultimately make me who I am. I know if I am honest, I can succeed. I know if I stay persistent, I can overcome any obstacle. I know if I work hard, I can accomplish anything.

Family History Affects Us

Colten Shores



In *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, he tells the story of two gentlemen with the same name but different fates. Wes one, the author, starts on a strong and down the right path, but once he gets older his decision making changes for the worse. Wes made decisions that lead him to being sent off to military school in which he graduates from and begins a completely new happy and healthy life. Wes two begins out a lot like Wes One as a child, but as he gets older instead of being sent somewhere for help or to make better choices, he keeps making decisions that ultimately land him in a prison cell. It details the description of the role decision making has in our lives. As humans, Wes one, Wes two and I both faced poverty, violence and drugs, which can all lead to making bad decisions and emotional distress, but in the end we can either create and lead ourselves down our own path or follow in the path that has been worn down by men and women that have ended up dead or in jail.

Wes One's mother worked multiple jobs in order to keep her family going. This connects to me because when we were little my mother worked three jobs just to keep us going. Like Wes's Mother, my mother wouldn't let the financial

downfall deprive us of a childhood. Both my mother and Wes's Mother worked extremely hard to give us what we have today. Wes tells of his mother and how they made it through by stating: "When we moved to New York, she worked multiple jobs, from a freelance writer for magazines and television to a furrier's assistant—whatever she could do to help cover her growing expenses. She had to provide for us, and she was helping out her parents, who were living off two small pensions and their small monthly Social Security check" (Moore 47). Wes's mother moved to the Bronx to move closer to her parents and to further her son's education. When she arrived in the Bronx she had come to find out that the public schools aren't like they were when she was a young child. Wes's mother spent a lot of money and time to send him to a private school where education was important. She moved closer to her parent's to help them financially and because of their growing age. Both of our moms worked hard to give us the education and help us become more achievable. My mother and disappearing father lived in a little 2 bedroom earth home. With the lake down the hill from the house, and the house tucked away in the thick timber. My father worked for the City of Savannah, at the Waste water plant. My mother worked extremely hard to provide for my sister and I. I tell of my father disappearing because as soon as he found out my mother was pregnant with me, he left my mother. She worked three jobs and still could not keep up, in the cause of all this mayhem we lost our house. We moved in with my grandparents who could barely support themselves as it was. We had help from the government even my father's side of the family who later showed up when we made it out

of our time of difficulty. It turns out he was with another woman the whole time. The significance is that both our mothers worked jobs to keep our family going, and poverty is something any of us can overcome.

While Wes Two was out his mother had begun searching his room. Under his bed lay two shoe boxes full of multiple types of drugs. When I was out to lunch with a couple of friends my mother had begun snooping around my room and found my hidden drugs. Neither Wes nor I use this as a lesson learned because we began to continue our life in the game and break our mother's heart. The author tells of Wes Two's mother finding about him being caught saying, "[His mom] felt like she'd been punched in the stomach. She sat down on the bed, unsure of what to think. She wasn't only upset about the drugs, she was upset about the lying" (Moore 73). When his mother expresses she felt like she had been punched, she means, she was let down by yet another son of hers. His mother was in pain because he had lied to her just like Wes's older brother from the beginning. Wes Two and I both got in trouble with our mothers. For both of us it was just a matter of time. My junior becoming a senior summer. I had drugs, drug accessories and money hidden in the secret cabinet I had cut out under my carpet. There sat a few empty fowl smelling bottles and a couple grams of marijuana and small amount of powder. I was hanging out with some friends. The phone call I received burns in the back of my memory. Enjoying my 18 wings of Honey BBQ at one of my favorite restaurants, Buffalo Wild Wings, I got a phone call from my mom. I wasn't thinking it would be anything big. I figured she was just asking where I was. Little did I know

my mother had caught me red handed. I returned home soon after lunch and she pulled out my stash of paraphernalia. My whole body felt like it dropped into the ground. She just began to cry, she didn't know what to do I was her first son. She was devastated and just demanded that I remove it from her house. Doing drugs and dealing them not only did disappoint my mother like Wes Two's mother, but I made terrible life choices. I began not caring about my body, my hygiene or who was affected by my choices. The only thing I cared about was the money. Being caught by my mother never led to severe punishment by her. Time began ticking and I'd have my run in with the police like Wes. The drugs both led us to make bad decisions and hurt the ones who loved us the most and we would later pay for that pain by jail time and rehabilitation.

In their close relationship Tony and Wes got into a fight due to Wes out selling and dealing drugs on the streets. Wes and I have both physically been hurt by loved ones and still it didn't turn us around we weren't going to let people tell us who we were or how to live our lives. Wes and Tony got into a scuffle in which the author describes, "Before Wes could even finish his sentence, Tony cocked back his arm and punched him dead in the face" (Moore 70). This just goes to show that no matter how close you are with anyone there will be disagreements and fights. Tony fought Wes solely on the fact because he knew the mistake he was making dealing drugs. Tony was watching out for his little brother and beginning to see a lot of himself in Wes. Tony didn't mean to physically hurt Wes, but in a long shot he tried to knock sense into him. Being physically beat up by loved ones trying to turn us around and make

us better people isn't uncommon between Wes and I. I had recently started a relationship with a girl I had been speaking to for a year or two now. She played an influential part in my life being a loved one, making better choices than I did just like Wes's brother had before he went to the streets selling drugs. In a weird way I looked up to her. She was smart, good looking and a great decision maker. I never had any of those traits and struggled in school especially being in the game. With all the other crazy stuff going on I really didn't need one but I felt she was there to help me. Like gods sign of a let me help you, but instead my mom came screaming to her about what she found in my room. My mother was good friends with her and had told her what I had been doing. She was coming over later and I was in my room cleaning up. She arrived earlier than I thought she would and the first thing before I could even say "Hey" or ask "Why are you here so early?" I got a slap, followed by the nastiest right hook I have ever seen or felt come from a girl. Catching me right in the nose it began gushing as soon as she connected. I stumbled to the ground and before I knew it punches were hitting me left and right. With her being a woman I was never going to lay a hand on her. I laid there taking this beating from a girl until all of her, sadness, and disappointment was out of her system. Then begun the fighting, I shouted, "What the hell was that for?!" screaming back, "I know you have been doing drugs Colten, your mom told me, you better get your act together or I'm gone!" I quickly exclaimed I'd stop. When in my head I'm thinking no girl is ever going to tell me what to do. I continued what I had done before I just lied to her. Why give up something I was good at and made quick

money? I wasn't going to stop. Like Wes I wasn't going to listen I knew what was best for me. I was my own person.

When Wes one was sent to military school due to the accidental occurrence of punching his sister in the mouth. His mother sent him off and he'd soon learn his place at school just like my mother and the police sent me to rehab. So, I could learn my lesson and start fresh, begin this new life. It was almost a second chance at life a chance Wes One and I share. One of the first mornings at school Wes decided not to listen to the morning horn and pull the covers over his head. His roommate begged him to get up or else they would get in trouble. Wes still refused to get up and instead of his roommate staying put, he ran to the hallway to stay on point. The sergeant asked where Wes was, the roommate didn't reply. He just forced his way in the room. The sergeant demanded Wes get up and he still refused. So, the sergeant left the room and Wes thought he had gotten away with it, but Wes goes on to say, "Moments later the door slammed opened again, hitting the wall so hard flakes of the crusty blue paint chipped off. My entire chain of command, eight large and angry teenagers, entered the room and, without saying a word, picked my mattress up off the top bunk and turned it over, dropping me five feet to the cold, hard, green-tiled floor" (Moore 89.) Wes had an encounter with more than just one of the sergeants, he had encountered eight. Eight pissed off guys that dumped him straight to the floor. Wes knew he wasn't at home anymore. He wasn't the big shot now they were, they told him what to do now. Wes and I both had rough run-ins with a higher force than us the military school sergeants and the highway patrol in my case.

Headed to work ready to tackle the day and accomplish something. The music in my car came chiming on and before I could get to the highway 169 exit. Blue and red lights glistened in the rear view mirror. I was on a “run” which meant I was taking drugs to someone so I sat in the car shaking and nervous. As the cop returned from his cruiser and handed me my insurance card and license, he then asked me to step out of the car. I knew I had been caught by this time so I immediately folded to him. I made him aware I had marijuana on me. He replied in this raspy disappointing voice, “I know son, we received a lead that you had illegal drugs.” My heart was racing now and I thought who would know? Why would they call on me? I was thrown into handcuffs and taken to the sheriff’s department. I’m in the back of the car thinking why me? How much time am I going to face? The drive felt like years and once we arrived I saw my mother. Sitting in the same room I’d be taken to, I felt like I was on the walk of shame while arriving. I entered the room with a counselor, cop, and my mother. They asked me why I had done this, what made me want to smoke or deal? I began to cry and just reply to them with a simple, “I don’t know sir.” The counselor looked up at me and said, “Do you want to end up in prison? Is that kind of man you want to be?” All I thought was no, never, this isn’t me. The cop then said, “Your mother called us.” I filled up with rage, anger, but most of all sadness and betrayal. I didn’t reply or say much neither did my mother. She looked at me as they lifted me from my chair and locked me up for the night. I spent the night in jail that night. I remember sitting against the cold hard floor and thinking, “never again.” I had gotten out and they chose not to book

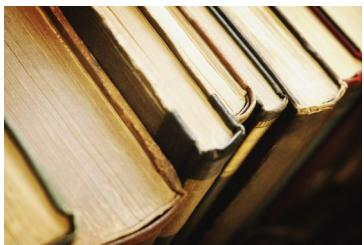
me, but to send me to a rehabilitation center. It felt worse than jail. I just wanted to go home. I spent four days there, where I heard people’s stories of how some lost their children, family members and other important things to drugs or violence. I was released from rehab November 18, 2011. I came home and the first thing I did when my mother picked me up was hug her as tight as I could and tell her I loved her. I was home and I was never turning to drugs again. Wes eventually graduated military school and his whole family was there to see it, they were all so proud of him. To Wes One, military school was his life changing moment and to me rehab was mine. As for Wes Two he remained in prison for his attempt at murder.

Since November 13, 2011 I have been drug free, I feel great that I can now say that. I never had to be sent off to military school. I got a lucky break and got help before I could have gotten myself killed or in prison. Whether we face violence, the drugs, or even poverty, we shouldn’t let these negative influences affect who we are. Wes made a lot of the same decisions I made, but ultimately I see Wes One and I as the same person because we used our past experiences to better ourselves for the future. Wes One gained a lot from being sent to military school and he later was happy where he was. When he graduated from military school he used it to his advantage and attended Johns Hopkins University. I was released from rehab and started school in the fall. My grades rose and I now attend Missouri Western State University. This just goes to show that no matter how you were brought up or the decisions you make in the past, you have the will power to change all of that. It’s easier said than done of course, but is

that how we want people to define us by the way we were brought up? No one I feel does. So will you let the influences in your past or present time affect who you are in the future?

Books Intimidate Me

Amanda Stoner



“The covers of this book are too far apart.” - Ambrose Bierce. It’s true, for me anyway that the size of the book makes me not want to read it. I don’t like my reading habits but I try to read selective books. However, most of the time I lose interest quickly or I find the size of the book intimidating and never finish it. Unfortunately reading was never an activity that was emphasized in my childhood, at home or school. As a child growing up, I didn’t see more than a newspaper or magazine at best in my grandparent’s and parent’s households. We didn’t go to the library often and when we would go it was for a short story time. We rarely checked out books for our leisure. I was not brought up to think like Richard Rodriguez in “The Lonely, Good Company of Books” and read hundreds of books to become educated; but I find myself to be more like Barbara Charline Jordan in “Becoming Educated” and because of education make reading a life or death matter. Reading a book is a struggle for me and I know I will have to learn to take each book one chapter at time and push through even if I find it less than appealing.

I remember teachers and librarians say that if you read the newspaper for fifteen minutes each day that was a good reading exercise. I thought to myself well that is easy enough and so I read the all the comics because it was a short read and humorous. The same went for book

reports, I would choose books that I could read in twenty minutes or less then write my book reports. I didn’t want to choose a book that would take me a couple of days for fear that I wouldn’t finish the book due to boredom and it didn’t help that there wasn’t anyone there encouraging me to read more.

Since I didn’t see my parents or grandparents read books/novels, I didn’t understand that this was a necessity in life and for success in education. I do remember reading assigned books such as The Iliad, The Odyssey, Oedipus Rex, Hamlet, etc...for my Latin class. We weren’t assigned any books to read in English class and while I thought it odd, I didn’t ask questions. I guess they figured there was enough reading to do in our text books, and back then I would have agreed. Now I wish they would have pushed us harder to read more material to get into the habit of good reading skills. I struggled through the majority of the books assigned to me to read and some I never understood fully even after having read the entire thing. I wasn’t reading for pleasure, it was an unwanted chore I couldn’t wait to be done with.

Like Rodriguez when I do find a book to read, I want it to be a pleasurable activity that I can enjoy anywhere at my own pace, somewhere where that I can get lost in the moment. Rodriguez expresses the times of day and where he liked to read, “In spite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity... Early in the mornings, I’d read in my bed...On the weekends I’d go to the public library...Or, if the weather was fine I would take my books to the park and read by a shade tree.” (Rodriguez, page 296) Unlike me, Rodriguez was a child of mixed backgrounds, Spanish and English and he felt that reading would educate

him. He accomplished reading a list of books before he entered high school and didn't stop there for he loved to be able to brag about the books he had read in his short life. However, Rodriguez lacked to understand some of these books and they became merely bragging rights. I think of reading as a chore and not a leisure activity because I don't take time for it. Therefore, I could not take a list such as Rodriguez did and read books for bragging rights. Any book that I have read or would read would have to relate in some way to me personally for me to enjoy it. I would need to gain something from it more than just bragging rights.

While books can be virtually about anything, I find it easier to put yourself in the book, to better understand, love, or hate it. As Eudora Welty expressed in "One Writer's Beginnings", "It had been startling and disappointing to me to find out that story books had been written by people, that books were not natural wonders, coming up of themselves like grass. Yet regardless of where they come from, I cannot remember a time when I was not in love with them...." (page 298) I have read very few books for pleasure, the most recent was The Twilight Saga, and yes I of course put myself in the place of the character Bella. I took on the emotions of that character, the events and trials she went through to gain the whole experience. From that I learned that the books were much easier to remember because it was as if I was there and lived the story. Of course not all books are easy to identify with and that is what I need to overcome. The less appealing books need to be taken in slower so that nothing is missed, that way at the end hopefully all the pieces come together.

In this aspect, today I find myself a

lot like Jordan, a Boston University Law student. Reading didn't come easily for her. She would sit in an empty library all night long, and at times without much sleep, just to go over the needed material and cases for her law class early the next morning. Jordan explains, "I felt that in order to compensate for what I had missed in earlier years, I would have to work harder, and study longer, than anybody else." (Jordan, page 182) Today, this is where I find myself as I attend Missouri Western State University and playing catch up with my studies. I will have to use time management wisely and sacrifice a lot of my desired activities while trying to stay on task throughout my years in college. Due to the lack of reading assignments throughout my basic educational experience, it will take a lot of hard work and dedication on my part to achieve my goals and after fourteen years I have accepted the challenge.

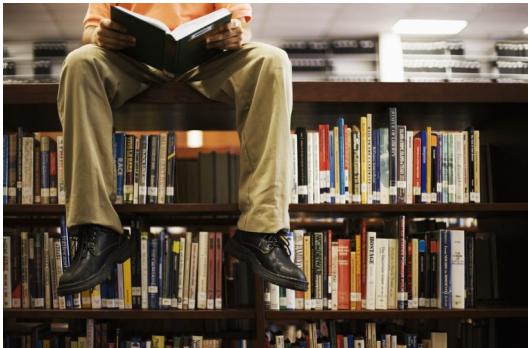
Being a perfectionist and dedicated to achieve my goals, I also look at the money that it costs to attend per semester and I treat my education much the same as she does, a life and death matter and can't afford to take the same class over and over. Jordan said, "Whereas it was a matter of life and death with me. I had to make law school. I just didn't have any alternatives. I could not afford to flunk out. That would have been an unmitigated disaster. So I read all the time I was not in class." (Jordan, Page 183) Jordan didn't understand why her friend didn't study and take her studies more seriously. Jordan said, "And from time to time I would go up to the fourth floor at 2 Rawley Street to check in on how Louise was doing. She was always reading *Redbook*. Every time I was in there and wanted to discuss one of these cases with her, she

was reading a short story in *Redbook*. I don't know how she could do that. She was not prepared in class when the professors called on her to discuss cases, but that did not bother her." (Jordan, Page 183) If I was in Louise's place, this would have made me feel foolish, stupid, and unworthy of a decent grade. This just goes to show you how different people have different priorities in life, including school.

In order to get through a large less than appealing book/novel you have to focus on the overall picture and take it chapter by chapter to gain the knowledge needed. Like Jordan I will spend a great deal of my college career in the library or at home alone reading and I will need to remember that even if I don't like the material it is vital. I also hope and thrive to have the longevity of Rodriguez and be able to push through the books are less appealing but I hope to gain the importance of the book not just another tally on the chart. We can all sit around and wish our childhoods were fulfilled with the love of reading and maybe it would have changed things, but all we can do now is look forward and push ourselves to read now for a better future.

Conformity as Bondage

Charles Tolles



What's all this talk of literacy? Literacy and education are tools for empowerment. In "How I Learned to Read and Write" by Frederick Douglass, the author talks about the idea that education could be a path to his freedom. Similarly, author Richard Rodriguez notes that reading could be important to his academic success in his work, titled "The Lonely Good Company of Books". I can relate to both authors because I grew up in an impoverished family and always knew that an education could provide me with a better future than the one that my parents had. Though I feel that education is an opportunity that every individual should be afforded, I have no interest in the literacy of others because I believe that education and literacy are matters of personal responsibility and choice, and to be free, one must make the choice to be free.

No one seemed to take much of an interest in my education, so I took it upon myself to excel academically. By the age of seven, I had quite an extensive resume of reading under my arm. I would read anything that I could get my hands on, but eventually took a special interest in science books, both fiction and nonfiction. I found the world around me fascinating and sought to understand it through reading. Like both authors noted above, I knew many authors who had developed an interest in my education, so I took it upon myself to excel academically. By the age of seven, I had quite an extensive resume of reading under my arm. I would read anything that I could get my hands on, but eventually took a special interest in science books, both fiction and nonfiction. I found the world around me fascinating and was very aware of how empowering reading could be. I spent many afternoons at the library soaking up knowledge and learning new things. I also enjoyed writing stories and poems, which helped me to express myself and my thoughts. I believe that reading and writing are essential skills that everyone should have, as they can help us to learn new things and express ourselves in a meaningful way. I am grateful for the opportunity to have developed an interest in my education, and I hope that others will also be inspired to do the same.

ly and willingly made education a priority in my life. This recalls a passage by Rodriguez: “Books were going to make me ‘educated’. *That* confidence enabled me [...]”(295). For this reason, I believe that the path to intelligence is a choice and not one taken by many. It is a difficult path, but the rewards are worth the effort. Intellectuals are often made fun of and ridiculed by their peers for not conforming to the social norm. However, conforming to the social norm means shunning education for the sake of fitting in, essentially binding ones self to a life of mediocrity. In

way, conformity is a form of bondage, one that education can free a person of. Adversely, I also feel that conforming to educational standards and criteria can be a form of bondage. Adhering to guidelines often leaves me feeling constrained and as though I did not put forth my best work. The need for a set of criteria and standards is not lost on me, but I feel that I do my best work when I am not boxed in by them. I look forward to the day when I have finally proven my academic worth on paper and am free to excel as I wish. For example, I am currently enrolled in a class that requires me to perform tasks in order to understand basic principles on a subject that I am already familiar with, so that I can then apply those principles to ideas

I can then apply those principles to ideas which I have already developed. In this way, adhering to guidelines is actually holding me back because I have previously educated myself on the subject. This point is moot however, as I know that I will eventually surpass these obstacles and flourish in my education because I choose to. I took an interest in reading at an early age and was very aware of how empowering the printed word could be. I spent many afternoons at the library soaking up

as much information as my young mind could tolerate. I would sift through books about science, art, history, and foreign cultures. I was also interested in works of fiction, though to a lesser degree. I was fascinated by the fictional works of Ray Bradbury, George Orwell, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, Carl Sagan, and Stephen King. Science fiction fueled my curiosity and answer a question or for carrying such a thirst for knowledge by showing me a large array of books. It was difficult and world that could be, while works of non-fiction displayed the world as it was and would be to quit trying to gain had been. Combining the two set my knowledge, but the thought of my eventual mind ablaze with ideas, hopes, and aspirations. I would often check out as many books as I could carry and find a nice quiet spot to read. Sometimes that would be a secluded corner of the library, a nice patch of green grass at the park, or just snuggled under my blanket in bed. I can relate to Richard Rodriguez when he states in his essay that:

In spite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books. Early on weekday mornings, I'd read in my bed. I'd feel a mysterious comfort then, reading in the dawn choice. They had chosen to conform to quiet-the blue-grey silence interrupted by the occasional churning of the refrigerator motor a few rooms away or the

more distant sound of a city bus beginning its run. On weekends I'd go to the public library to read, surrounded by old men and women. Or, if the weather was fine, I would take my books to the park and read in the shade of a tree. Neighbors would leave Douglass when I read his words. Writing for vacation and I would wa-

ter their lawns. I would sit through the twilight on the front porches or in backyards, reading to the cool, whirling sounds of the sprinklers (296).

I was often teased by classmates for being too quick to raise my hand to answer a question or for carrying such a thirst for knowledge by showing me a large array of books. It was difficult and at times I would think of how easy it would be to quit trying to gain al freedom from the life of poverty and beatings. I would often check out as many books as I could carry and find a nice quiet spot to read. Sometimes that would be a secluded corner of the library, a nice patch of green grass at the park, or just snuggled under my blanket in bed. I can relate to Richard Rodriguez when he thought of the power in the words of the book or the beautiful music in the or-

The silver trump of freedom had roused my soul to eternal wakefulness. Freedom now appeared, to disappear no more forever. It was heard in every sound, and seen in every thing. It was ever present to torment me with a sense of my wretched condition. I saw nothing without seeing it, I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled from every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm (274).

To this day, my love of learning burns bright within and though it still separates me from my peers and I still struggle with making friends, I refuse to dumb myself down in order to fit in. It can sometimes be a lonely existence and I often wonder if it will ever pay off. The words of Douglass resonate in my mind: “I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed” (274). Education is freedom. Freedom is a fire that burns within us all. If that fire is suppressed long enough, it may just go out. I nurture the warm light of the fire, feeding it whenever possible, feeling it grow brighter and stronger with each passing day.

Every person has the right and responsibility to be educated and must make the conscious choice to pursue their freedom through education. Literacy and education are empowering tools that must be gained through hard work and sometimes making the hard choices. That empowerment is not about being cool or fit-

ting in, it’s about personal responsibility in securing ones own future. Pursuing a thorough education can open up a world of endless opportunities and possibilities if only the choice is made to do so. Break the bonds of social convention! Break the bonds of conformity! Be free!

The Ranch

Charles Tolles



Not many people can say that they have tussled with a mountain lion and lived to tell the story. Events that seem tragic or hard can easily be the very things that do the most to shape us into the people that we become. Living in a homeless camp with my family at seven years old, I was no stranger to hardship, though I'd never really spent much time on my own or had to fend for myself. When I got the news that we would be spending the next eight months as caretakers of a ranch in South Dakota, I was thrilled at the idea. It was a summer camp, called The Circle "R" Ranch, which sat empty from September until April and needed winter caretakers. The lessons and ideologies that I gained during my stay there have been a significant part of my life from that time until now. I learned to be strong on my own and found an appreciation for life.

We left Nebraska for South Dakota in early September, shortly after my eighth birthday. The drive was long and boring, but I clearly remember my first glimpse of the majestic Black Hills. The dry cool air was a refreshing change from the relentless heat and humidity that we had endured at the homeless camp all summer long. The rolling green hills slowly gave way to lush conifer covered

mountains. As we pulled off of the highway onto a gravel road lined with trees taller than I'd ever thought possible, I was awestruck at the unrelenting beauty that surrounded me. The underbrush moved as countless critters scurried away from the sound of our car lumbering up the old road, my mind wandering at all of the endless possibilities that lay ahead.

We continued up the long winding gravel road, which turned out to be the driveway of the ranch, for several miles before coming to a clearing. There stood the chapel, looming over us like the trees that surrounded it. It was made of logs and was the biggest and most amazing church that I had ever seen. To the left of the church was the common building. It was a sprawling one story building with aluminum siding and stood in stark contrast to the church next to it. I was a little disappointed to learn that we would be staying in the common building, but was anxious to start exploring everything.

Within an hour of arriving, I had already ventured out on my own. In the rear of the common building, I found a trail that led off into the forest. I followed the trail for what seemed like hours, sometimes having to fight my way through the thick underbrush. After some time, I came to a clearing that was about fifty feet across with a ten foot tall cross in the center and a steep, high cliff to the left. It was sunset and the cliff faced the West, giving me an amazing view. Looking out, with the eagles soaring above the conifers below me, and the rainbow sky above, I decided to name my new found spot "Lookout Point". I returned many times to my secret spot for solitude and reflection.

With dusk creeping in, I knew that I had a long hike ahead of me, followed by a severe beating for my disappearance,

so I started on my journey back. I fantasized about wandering off into the wilderness and living off of the land, but the thought of my mothers resulting distress led me back to reality. I kept to the trail as best as I could, but I could barely see. My mind started to race with fear as I came to realize how dark the night could be without the constant glow of the city. Being born and raised in Omaha, I had never experienced the wilderness, nor the true dark of night. I could hear owls calling, bats screeching, rodents skittering, and larger things slowly lumbering. My eyes and ears were playing tricks on me. I was sure that something was following me and I would break out into a dead run, only to trip over a branch, log, or my own feet. I was very relieved when I saw the back of the common building until I remembered the beating that awaited me. I casually strolled inside and told my step dad that I had gotten lost in the woods, hoping that the lie would minimize my beating, but it did not. A couple of days later, I told my step dad that I thought that something had been following me on the night of my expedition. He told me that it was probably mountain lions, while sporting an ear to ear grin. He gave me a brief rundown of how to handle an encounter with a predator, but my I was sure that he was putting me on. "Mountain lions," I thought, "there aren't any lions in this country." Either way, I was always on the lookout for suspicious activity from then on.

I took to disappearing into the woods for most of the day; exploring, climbing, and foraging for berries and mushrooms like I'd read about in survival books at the library. I would build forts from fallen limbs, dig caves into the sides of muddy ravines, and swim in the many creeks. When it started getting cold, I'd

build a fire and warm my hands next to the flames, listening to the wood crackle and pop.

One evening, while sitting next to my fire and eating a wild mushroom, I became violently ill. I started to vomit profusely and my head was pounding. I wasn't far from home and found my way back just as the hallucinations began. I was in bed with a fever and visions for several days, but recovered quickly after that. I vowed never to eat mushrooms for the rest of my life and still have not. The sight alone of a mushroom, even a drawing or sculpture, still makes me nauseous. The mushroom incident did not put me off of my excursions, however, and I continued to disappear; only now it was for days at a time. It seemed that my "family" had gotten used to my absence and didn't think much of an eight year old boy vanishing into the woods for days at a time. Some great memories were made in that time, even the bad ones.

In January, while on a snowy hike to lookout point, I was attacked by a mountain lion. Walking along the trail, I heard rustling from the nearby brush. I had grown accustomed to the sounds that seemed to follow me and didn't think much of it. Taking tall steps in the knee deep snow, I lost my footing and fell face first into the snow pack. Before I had time to gather myself, I felt sharp stinging pains in my left calf that shot hot sparks into my brain. I instinctively pulled my leg toward my body and immediately felt the pain rip and slice down my calf as I screamed. Brushing the snow and freezing tears from my face, I saw it. A mountain lion, as big as a medium sized dog, had my booted foot in its mouth and both sets of claws dug deep into my leg. I sat up, punching and clawing at its face, but that just made

it thrash and pull harder. Remembering my conversation with my step dad from months before, I buried my thumb as deeply as I could into its eye socket. It immediately let go of my leg and let out an awful shriek as it ran for the safety of the brush. I knew it would be back so I got up and ran for home, ignoring the pain and the blood spattering the pure white snow like a passionate painter flinging paint at the canvas with his brush. The blood was running so freely that I could see steam rise as it landed on the snow. I made it home and never lost consciousness. However, being out in the remoteness of the Black Hills meant that the closest hospital was over an hour drive away, so my mother wrapped a tourniquet around my knee and towels around my calf while we sped to the hospital. Four weeks later, I was out of the hospital and back to my forest. I had no fear of the mountain lions. "If I beat them once, I could do it again", I confidently told myself.

By now, it was early March and still bitterly cold. We had been sleeping in the church because it had a fireplace and the common building was without heat. We had also hung plastic from the lower rafters to help insulate the tall structure. It was slightly warmer than the outside, but only slightly. One cold night, I awoke feeling very hot. Opening my eyes, it took a moment to realize what I was seeing: the entire pulpit was ablaze. I woke everyone and we ran for the door while flaming plastic dripped all around us, making whooshing and zipping sounds as it did. A small glob of flaming plastic landed on my back, but I hardly noticed as I was focused on the door. Somehow, my step dad managed to rip my flaming shirt off of me without breaking stride. Once out the door, we turned and watched the

flames engulf the church. The flames reached so high that they licked the cross on top of the towering spire. We learned later that an ember had probably floated up from the fireplace to the plastic drop ceiling and started the blaze. The only injury sustained was a palm shaped burn to my back, which still remains as a scar. We were nearing the end of our stay at the ranch, and we all silently knew that the fire would mean our eviction.

Sadly, I never saw the ranch again after that night, but I have many memories from my stay there; some good, some bad, but all significant and all with a lesson learned. I learned to be self sufficient and to fear not the unknown, but rather to face it with determination, courage, and resolve. I also reaffirmed my love for the wonders of nature and all that this world has to offer. I'll never forget my time there and my "trial by fire" introduction to Mother Nature and all of her beauties. Even with the claws and teeth of the mountain lion in my left leg, my brain comprehended the beauty and perfection of the beast. The experiences were just a few of many that shaped me into the man that I am today and I would go through it all again, without a second thought.

Winter

Charles Tolles



One of my most vivid memories is of an icy winter evening spent playing outside as a child. I long for the cold and snow in this dreary, oppressive summer heat. You see, the memory of this day has stayed with me throughout the years as a source of awe and wonder. For the first time in my short life, I felt that the world wasn't such a bad place after all and that there were beautiful things everywhere, if I would just open my eyes. The mere sight of ice, frost, or even the color white still fills me with hope and inspiration.

One cold winter day, when I was five years old, my siblings and I were staying in a group home for children called The Crisis Center. Unfortunately, my mother had a moderate drug and alcohol problem and we would sometimes stay there while she attempted rehabilitation or recovery. Of course, being young children, we did not know that she had a drug problem. However, life at home was tough and quite depressing and even at that young age, I was far too aware of my situation. The Crisis Center was a fun place for us children. Unlike home, in this place we had beds, regular meals, adults that took care of us, and fun activities to participate in. There were also arcade games that did not require quarters, which we loved since vid-

eo games were a rare occurrence in our lives. Even with all of the fun things to do, one of my favorite ways to spend the day was simply to sit at the window where it was cold and watch the snow fall.

On this day in particular, I wanted badly to play in the snow. I was told that a storm was coming and that we had to stay inside. I was disappointed, but accepted defeat and went to bed early. Later that evening, a counselor came into my room and woke me. She told me that I had a visitor waiting for me! I was excited because I had never had a visitor before. As I walked out into the hallway, my bare clammy feet sticking slightly to the cold tile floor, my heart fluttered with excitement! "Who could it be?" I wondered. The sound of sleet falling on the tin roof echoed through the halls, sounding like thousands of tiny bells. As I rounded the corner into the rec-room, I saw my Aunt Lois, her smiling face beaming at me from the couch. This, in itself, was a wonderful surprise! I broke into a run and jumped into her awaiting arms!

After our cheerful greeting, she asked me if I'd like to play outside. Of course, my answer was an emphatic "Yes!" She dressed me in bulky winter clothes and topped off my head with a soft red stocking cap that she had knitted herself. The cap had a soft fluffy ball on top, made of frayed yarn and was tailor made just for me, so it fit perfectly. "Are we going to make snow angels?" I asked.

"You are my snow angel!" she replied. I was filled with such joy and eager anticipation as we walked to the door that I wanted to run! I've always loved playing in the snow and could not wait to get outside!

The courtyard was spacious, with trees, wrought iron benches and lamp

posts, a small playground with slides and swings, and a small bronze statue of a parent and child. Everything was blanketed in a moderate covering of lamp post and touched the glass-like icy snow, but it had also been sleet for hours, so the world glistened and sparkled as if covered in a layer of fine crystal: even the snow itself. The air was crisp, cold, and clean, and it tasted like ice. My aunt held my hand with her cold and bony fingers as we took our first tentative steps out onto the icy sidewalk. I slipped and almost fell, but her reassuring grip and smile made me feel safe. We looked around the beautiful frozen landscape, scouting out a good spot to make snow angels. "Over there, Aunt Lois!" I exclaimed, pointing across the yard to a blank slate of pure white powder.

I wanted to feel the ice: to embrace the beauty that I saw and felt in my heart. I walked cautiously to a nearby lamp post and touched the glass-like icy snow, making the surface cold and slick. I felt the cold move into and up my fingers. It was a soothing cold and not at all uncomfortable. I loved the feeling of the refreshing chill. Behind me, I could hear the ice laden trees moan and crackle under the pain of the weight as they swayed slightly in the light breeze. They, it seems, did not feel the same about the ice as I did. I looked their way to see what was all the fuss was about. I turned just in time to see a small branch break off under the pressure. "How sad" I thought, but my eyes were immediately drawn to the fallen limb. Even in its sad, broken

"That looks perfect!" she replied. state, it too was very pretty. "Look, Aunt We did not realize that everything, even Lois! I found a glass branch!" I said, my the snow, was completely covered in an eyes sparkling in the light from the near-icy shell. by lamp post, just like everything around

As we started on our short journey me.

across the courtyard, my mind was filled with wonder and amazement at the way that everything glistened. The layer of ice was so thick that we could walk on top of

the snow without leaving a single footprint, though sometimes I would step on a thin spot and the ice would give out a satisfying crunch, like cracking the top of crème brûlée with the back of a spoon. Everything shone with a beauty and sparkle like I had never known. The air itself was alive with a million points of light from the still falling sleet. It looked like a star filled sky from some magical, unknown universe where anything was possible. Indeed, I did feel like anything was possible. The entire world, which sometimes seemed so bleak and hard, was now more wondrous than my young brain had ever imagined it could be.

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"That's very pretty!" she replied.

continued our adventure for some finding endless sights at which to er.

Sadly, the magical evening ended early, though an eternity would not have been long enough. I wanted to stay longer in my crystal wonderland, where time seemed to stand still and frozen like a landscape. To this day, I crave the memory of that perfect scene and the first breath of cold fresh air that I get when I step outside on an icy winter day. The beauty of winter brings the memory and feelings of that day flooding back into me, and it makes me remember that this world, though it can be harsh, can also be beautiful, depending on how you look at it. Beauty truly is in the eye of the beholder. We never did get to make our

snow angels, but the memory of that one perfect evening will always be with me, inspiring my dreams and filling me with hope and wonder for the future of myself and this world. The experience showed me that one can find awe and inspiration in the mundane, uninspiring, or even dreadful if we only open our eyes and minds to what lies beneath.

My Neighbor Mr. G.P.

Ida Trueblood



At one point in my life, I was living in a trailer park with my four children. Some of us, in the park, had very little. I at least had a decent paying job trying to support my children and me. At the time I was getting no help from where I should have had help from. Every time I ask for help I was denied. I was denied food stamps; apparently I made \$50 over the limit. The court messed up the paper work so that I could not get child support. There were many instances in which people who should have been helping me, did the opposite of what they should have been doing. Keeping the bills paid and a roof over our heads was almost impossible. I was very sick with an undiagnosed illness, even after seeing a super specialist. It was extremely hard for this mother to keep a job and her head above water. It was a constant assault of problems of one kind or another. It is thought-provoking when someone just shows up without notice with just the right story that is needed for a time when everything seems out of control and tumultuous. During this time was when I met Mr. G.P. His stories of monumental misfortunes some people have lived through, came to me at a time when I needed the reinforcement to keep things in a proper perspective, renewing the hope that better times will come.

Mr. G. P. was a neighbor in the

trailer park where I lived with my four children. The first time I met Mr. G.P. was a very cold winter day, after a heavy snow when I was shoveling out my car. The next thing I know Mr G.P., who lived up around the loop of the trailer court, was shoveling away, helping me to shovel out my car. Luckily, there was the area just behind the car to shovel, but the snow was above the back bumper. I was afraid he was going to want money even though I had not asked him to help. But instead, he asked if I would have a package of meat he could have, since he and his wife had no food at all at their place. I had made it a point of having food in my house, stocking up with main items that were on sale, whenever possible. I had items such as rice, flour, sugar, beans, cheapest kinds meats and other necessary food items. I got a bag and put a couple packages of meat in the bag on top of some dollar bills, I just happened to have. Usually I did not have any money with me. Because it was so cold, we did not visit; instead he took the bag and went back to his place, up around the trailer park loop. I was hoping that he would not make a habit of coming around wanting more, since my meager living was barely enough for me and my children. I did not need anything or anyone else to deal with at the time.

Later that spring he stopped by for a visit. He was talking about himself. He was a thin man of medium height with thinning hair and no teeth. At age 49, he was facing open heart surgery. He went on to tell me this story. He had been an over-the-road truck driver. Years earlier, he had a girlfriend and he said they were serious about one another. Then, she just up and disappeared without saying anything. Eight months later, he found her. She had gone back to her folks

upon finding out she was pregnant thinking he would not want to have anything to do with her and a baby. He said he told her that he wished she would have said something because yes, he did want to take care of her and the baby as well as get married to her. After the little boy was born, they planned the wedding. He told me it was the wedding day and he and the best man were standing at the altar waiting for her to appear for the wedding to begin. Five minutes before the wedding was to start, her father and a State Trooper came in and informed him that she had been in a fatal car accident on the way to the church. He said he was kinda out of it for a long time. He said several years went by, then, he met another lady and they fell in love. This time he made sure she knew that he would take care of her and not to leave if she got pregnant. Well, she did get pregnant. They planned the wedding for soon after the baby was born. She was about eight months along when they had some banking business to attend to. He opened the door and stepped back to allow her to enter the bank first. There was a robbery in progress and she was shot point blank in the chest by one of the robbers on the way out of the bank. She died right there. He said he watched his daughter being delivered by C-section there on the sidewalk. His little boy's and little girl's maternal grandparents took and raised them. Mr. G. P. said he spent a very long time being mad at the whole world over these crushing events. Mr. G. P. said that he just drove his truck shutting himself away from everyone afraid to reach out to anyone. In view of my own problems, I understood why Mr. G.P. had been afraid to associate with anyone, and afraid that dreadful things would only get worse.

Mr. G.P. said that several years went by in which he did not associate with anyone. One day he said, he was at a truck stop eating, just minding his own business, and not talking to any one, when a group of people came into the café. He thought, he told me, that one of those people looked familiar. Oh well, he thought, and went back to his eating minding his own business. About that time, a guy tapped him on the shoulder and said, "My name is Burt Reynolds and I would like for you, with your truck, to be in my movie we are making." So with his truck, he was in the Burt Reynolds movie-Smokey And the Bandit. He said that he was also in Smokey And the Bandit II. He had a wonderful time meeting all the people making the movies. After that, he finally met and married his wife and life, for Mr. G.P., was filled with peace and contentment... for the most part he said. This encouraged me to hang in there, knowing that everything is temporary, and everything changes. Even though some changes seem to take forever in coming, especially when the tough times seem to be winning, good changes do eventually come along.

I have met people who do nothing except whine and gripe about their problems as though their problems are vastly monumental to everyone else's problems. At a time, for me, when a lot of things were merciless, and should not have happened, Mr. G. P. tells me his story, a story of being as low as a person can be, and not giving into despair or insanity, a story about how good things also come along. I think it helped MR.G.P. to relate this story of misery and the ray of sunshine in his life. The only people who have had things worse than I, are people who have had to deal with a mortician concerning sudden death such as what Mr. G.P did. Whenever I

think I am having a difficult time of it, I think of Mr G. P. and his massive painful tragedies. This helps me to count my blessings and thank God Almighty that I have never had to walk in Mr. G.P.'s shoes, and, pray I never have to and pray for those who have.

Carnival Life

Nona Walters



When we drove up to the midway that day, I was like a child on Christmas morning. Imagine my surprise when my parents announced that this was not an afternoon at the carnival, it was home. Walking down the lane with the Ferris wheel and the Merry-go-Round on my right, and cotton candy and funnel cake on my left, I thought this had to be the greatest neighborhood ever. There were people standing around waiting to welcome us, like we were famous or something. Everyone was kind and helpful and eager to make sure we had everything we needed. The best thing was the other kids though. I met another six year old girl, and all of the kids were excited to meet us. They took my sisters and me under their wings and showed us around, explaining along the way how everything worked. It was amazing to me that everyone just accepted us, without judgment. I didn't know then that Johnny's United Carnival would be where I learned the most important values about family and life, but that is exactly what happened.

I never really knew why my parents chose to give up our normal life and move our family into a 1970's Buick station wagon. We took only enough clothes to fit into two suitcases. Everything else we left behind. The only toy I owned for two years

was a plastic purple rhinoceros that lived in a Styrofoam cup that I found at a rest area. The station wagon became our home, where we ate, slept, and played. With my two sisters and parents, we were a lot like sardines in a can at bedtime. It was an interesting kind of mobile home. We never complained.

Johnny's United would arrive in a new town on a Wednesday or Thursday evening, a colorful convoy of eighteen wheelers, vans, and cars. There would be a mad rush of setting up rides, game booths, and getting the concession stands restocked before the gates opened. Even the children had jobs. My sisters and I would blow up balloons for the balloon dart game. The balloons had to be just perfect, because if they had too much air they were easier to pop. The secret was to put in just enough air to make them soft, so the darts would bounce off of them. My oldest sister, who was nine at the time, would babysit the younger kids so their parents could work. Once the gates opened, our job was to carry around large stuffed animals so the town people thought we won them.

It doesn't matter how long you've lived with the show, how many opening nights you've experienced, that first night is always a rush of excitement. The gates would open and the people from town would pour in, the loud music, and the many colored lights flashing off the rides made your heart beat faster. The air filled with those wonderful carnival smells, hot grease, popcorn, and diesel fuel. Everywhere you heard excited children screaming, and the laughter of their parents trying to keep up. On opening night the 'carney kids' would get together and pretend for a while that we were normal town kids. We would ride the rides and have a

little fun after day of hard work.

We were able to ride each ride two times for free every day, except for the Himalaya. That one we could ride as many times as we liked. It had seats like a roller coaster and everyone had to buckle in. The cars would go around in a circle, up a little hill, and back down making your stomach drop to your toes. The Himalaya was run by a man everyone called Preacher, and he had a soft spot for the carney kids. His ride was our favorite because it was fast and loud. Preacher would get it going so fast people would stagger around looking drunk when they got off. We would ride it as many times as we could handle without getting sick.

The carney kids had the run of the midway while the show was open. Every parent was working. We were never completely unsupervised though. Someone was always watching. The adults kept an eye on all of the kids, so we were never in danger. We ran all over the place, playing in cars and trailers. We played under the rides, where we would find money that fell out of people's pockets. We were a strange bunch of dirty, often hungry, wild children. We knew how to behave, though. Often our parents would be drunk, or on one of the many drugs floating around the midway. When they got drunk enough they would sometimes fight with each other. The fast pace of the carnival made everyone tense after awhile.

Living on the carnival was often scary too. I will never forget the complete fear I felt when our car broke down in Georgia. We had a tow truck haul our car to a shop, where we intended to wait for the shop owner to get the part we needed. We watched this man get into his car and start it up. As soon as he turned the key,

the car exploded. We later learned that the man was having some kind of a turf war with the rest of the people in the neighborhood. I will never forget watching that man getting into that car, and watching it blow up. I will also never forget the panic of my dad screaming for us to get into the basement. I believe it was the first time I had ever seen him afraid of anything.

Johnny's United Carnival toured all over the southern United States. In Florida we saw an alligator in the ditch when we stopped on the side of the road to use the bathroom. In Tennessee we toured the Jack Daniels plant, which was about the nastiest thing I've ever smelled. We toured some caves in Kentucky. We went so far underground I couldn't breathe. We even visited the Grand Canyon. For two years, we sat in the back of that car waiting to see what our next adventure would be.

We didn't attend school with the carnival and our parents didn't bother with homeschooling either. When we did finally leave the show, I was eight years old. My parents placed me in the third grade, and I was forced to catch up. The next year I was told I would have to repeat the fourth grade. We had moved to Cheyenne, Wyoming, and their schools were a little more advanced than the school I had attended in Kansas. My parents held me back, and I spent the entire year working twice as hard as the other kids to catch up. I learned a lot about discipline that year.

Although life on the carnival probably wouldn't be considered ideal for a child, it was a great experience. I learned to never judge a person by the way they look, because even though we all looked dirty and sometimes even shady, we were a family. We would have done whatever

we had to in order to protect ourselves and each other. I learned that you don't need a room full of toys and designer clothes to be happy. We had an entire midway for a playground, and we explored every inch of it. We learned to communicate with each other. We also learned to live without T.V. and we all have a great appreciation for music. We learned to take care of ourselves too, because there wasn't always someone close by to do it for us. I would never load my children up and join a carnival, but I have tried to teach them the same values I learned while I was there. When I take them to a carnival I always take a moment to enjoy those smells and sights. I remember that opening night excitement when the lights go on and the rides start moving. I always remember to thank the person running the ride, concession stand, or game because I know what they went through to get it ready.

It's Not Me

Nona Walters



It was many years after I left home that I finally began to learn my own identity, when I could hold my head up and look a person, a stranger in the eyes. Growing up in a home that consisted of far more abuse than love, and being afraid to be anything other than what I was told, it was inevitable I would lack the confidence required to be myself. Like James Baldwin explains in "Notes of a Native Son," I left home full of anger and contempt for the man I called Dad. It wasn't until I was away from home that I realized his anger, always directed in physical abuse towards my sisters and me, had to have originated somewhere, and that by carrying that hatred inside me, I risked becoming the man I loathed. Like Baldwin, I had to realize that it was up to me to make the changes to my heart, before it led to another generation of abuse.

Baldwin says, "I had inclined to be contemptuous of my father for the conditions of his life, for the conditions of our lives (126)." This statement describes well the way I felt about my step-dad. As children we were forced to live in the cheapest of houses, to wear clothes my mother found free at charity stores. Although we were not black like Baldwin, we were judged by the way we looked, and the

way we talked. We traveled around so much as children we never had a chance to make friends, or establish ourselves. Once we finally stopped moving the damage had already been done in our minds, and we were afraid to stand up for ourselves. For these offenses, I was contemptuous of my step-dad, embarrassed and even disappointed that he would allow us to be treated this way.

Like Baldwin states, "In his outrageously demanding and protective way, he loved his children (128)." it was easy to see Tom really did love us girls. But whatever inner demons he had to deal with, he was unable to love us in the gentle manner most children experience. He tried to show us in little ways, like teaching me to shoot guns, his biggest hobby. He showed us off in church on Sundays when he had us polished to a high shine and looking like dolls. If we moved a muscle though, he had a way of hitting us on the top of the head so hard it brought tears to our eyes, yet no one else realized what he had done. He expected us to be perfect in public, to be seen, not heard. If his rules were not followed the punishment was severe, like the two by four inch piece of wood he used as a paddle. Yet I remember the time I was so sick he was afraid I was going to die. My fever was high, and I could not get out of bed. He sat beside me and held my hand for hours, and he cried. After a while he took a dollar bill from his wallet and tore it in half, giving one to me and sticking the other back in his wallet. He carried that there for years. I know without a doubt that he loved us. I think he just truly didn't know how to show it.

We were never happy to see our step-father walk through the door, like Baldwin says about his own father on page 128. We were actually in a state of

fear the moment he pulled into the driveway. I would run frantically through the house, making sure I had left nothing out of place, because he missed absolutely nothing. I never asked for help with homework, because I was expected to know the answers. He would not accept stupid children, or stupid questions. He had no patience for crying or whining. The stress of him simply walking through the door was often so overwhelming we would run to our rooms and hide. We never had toys as children, but we had a whole library of books we could borrow from the school, and I spent a lot of time escaping into someone else's life, imagining I was there, instead of home.

Baldwin states, "I saw nothing very clearly but I did see this, that my life, my real life, was in danger, and not from anything other people might do, but from the hatred I carried in my own heart (134)." This sentence was so powerful for me, because it was not until I held my first child in my arms, that I realized how much danger I was in of becoming my step-father. I was angry at the world for not protecting me from abuses beyond the imagination. I was angry at him for making me angry in the first place. I felt that the world had failed me, by not taking me away from that home, and leaving me with those memories and permanent scars. I was most angry with my mother for not taking us away from that evil. I knew though, that those things had passed, and I was given the gift of raising my own children. I knew as I gazed at my baby that I had to overcome that anger. I had to get rid of that anger in my heart.

Baldwin also states, "This fight begins however in the heart and now it had been laid to my charge to keep my own heart free of hatred and despair (144)."

Although I have not seen my step father in many years, I had to make the choice to forgive him. I had to decide to either let that hate consume me for the rest of my life, or to hold my head up and be me. For myself as well as my children I chose forgiveness. I choose to love my children with everything I have. I hold on to them in the good times and the bad. And never out of anger do I abuse them. I had to identify myself as my own person, and allow myself to make mistakes along the way. It was an adventure in itself discovering what kind of person I really am. I do not have a problem looking in the eyes of anyone, whether they are classes above me or not. We are all created equally, and our lives are usually where we decide to keep them. We have the ability and the responsibility to make whatever changes are necessary in our own personal lives, to be able to live without letting those demons control us.

Country Life

Lori White



As I pull in I immediately see the row of fifteen mailboxes still sitting upon their posts to the right of me. I stop in the entrance of the little trailer park to take everything in before deciding to go left and park next to the basketball court. As I step outside my car, the warm summer breeze fills my nostrils with the combination of freshly cut grass, pine trees and the cornfield. I walk towards the monstrous sycamore and sit beneath its welcoming shade. How many bare hands and feet have touched this tree over its years? I know I've had my share of competitions with the neighborhood kids to see who could climb the highest. Oh yes how I've missed this place. This is where I grew up. This is where all my fond memories of childhood transpire.

The trailer court still looks very much like the one I left many years ago. The fourteen mobile homes sit in two half circles that start at the top of a hill and descend down and around. The first six mobile homes make up the top side, and the remaining eight make up the bottom half. Between the top side and bottom is a big open field where the sycamore rests alongside a basketball court. There is only one entrance in and out of the little park and it sits on the south side. On the northern border is a stretch of cornfields and to the east and west there is a cluster of trees. Everything is the same as I remember when I was a child, except for

a few different mobile homes that have taken the place of the ones no longer here, and of course different families.

When I lived here there were six families that had kids and we were all around the same age. My Aunt Roseanna lived across the street from us so I always had my cousins: Darrell, Brandi and Josh. Then there were the Felders who lived beside my aunt, and they had five kids. The eldest two were girls Erin and Amy, and then the boys Mikey, Zach, and Jacob were around same age as my cousins and me. Next to the Felders lived Ryan and Rachel Stone with their mom. The other four kids I don't recall that well since they lived on the bottom half and only came out if we were all playing baseball, basketball, or football down in the open field.

Brandi was only six months older than me, and since we spent every waking moment together we were more like sisters than cousins. We would lie on the hill for what seemed like hours watching the clouds float by as we would point out a bunny or mermaid until the other could see it too. When we weren't cloud watching, we would play in the dirt with the boys, and their hot wheels. My cousin Brandi and I were tomboys through and through so anything the boys did we had to do it too. Only thing is that sometimes the boys played a little rough. This one time when we were all playing football, Ryan threw the ball so hard that my pinky got in the way as I caught it. This left me with a broken finger as well as a cracked rib from being tackled so hard. My grandma got so mad that she refused to let me play any contact sports until the following summer. There was plenty of other stuff to do though like riding our bikes down to Possum Holler and back, climbing trees, and building tree houses.

That summer was the same year we discovered how much fun we could have rolling down the long hill, giggling as we attempted to stand up just to fall back down from dizziness. Of course we were eaten up by chiggers at the end of the day but we had a blast. There was always something to do no matter what time of year it was.

My fondest memory is of the winter we built an igloo. There seemed to be an abundant amount of snow and it was during Christmas break so we had more time than we knew what to do with. All the boys gathered up shovels and scooped up all the snow until there was just a layer of about an eighth of an inch. This gave us a 3 by 4 ft. asymmetrical rectangle. Darrell, Brandi, Mikey, Ryan, Rachel and I worked together as we packed the snow into tiny bricks and began to stack it up and around us. We continued to build as if we were ants building a tunnel. Then simultaneously as we were surrounded by three four feet walls we all stopped and looked at each other. "How do we make it curve in for a roof?" my older cousin Darrell finally asked. We all kind of just sat there for a moment until Mikey finally declared he had an idea. He sent us girls to make the doorway and as we were finishing it up it connected to a roof. To this day I still wonder how they built that roof and wish I would have helped them instead so I could know. I guess at the time it wasn't that important how it got done; I was just happy we had somewhere to come in out of the cold without going home. We kids never liked to go inside unless it was dinner time. We didn't sit around a TV or computer all day. We had fun, coming up with new adventures, and making memories that last a lifetime.

I get up from my cozy spot beneath

my dear old friend and touch his trunk. If this tree could talk he would tell you countless stories of children he has raised over the years. He would tell you how he always got the luxury of being base as we would run around playing hide and seek. How he was often tickled by tiny feet and hands as we retrieved our windblown kites from within his branches? How he watched each one of us grow up and eventually leave him. So many memories this old tree and I have shared over the many years spent here. I didn't just grow up here; this place is the definition of my childhood.

Education: American Youth in Crisis

Amanda Winchester



Most people have heard about the decline in America's educational system through political debates, the mainstream media, movies, in the classroom, or other social forums. There are many opinions on what the crisis consists of and how we as a people may rectify the situation with our educational system. Some people believe that our educational system should be modeled after other countries such as Asia where education excels, which would include longer school years and a higher annual salary for teachers. Leonid Fridman mentions the treatment of America's teachers versus the teachers of other countries in his essay "America Needs Its Nerds" by stating "In many parts of the world, university professorships are the most prestigious and materially rewarding positions. But not in America, where average professional ballplayers are much more respected and better paid than faculty members of the best universities" (257). Also mentioned in Fridman's essay is the idea that America does not value the intellectual student and that the anti-intellectual values expressed in our society are part of the downfall of our educational system. I do believe that if education is not valued in a child's household, then it is less likely that the child is going to value education and because we have become a society of mainstream media, we

may be sending the wrong signal by expressing to the impressionable youth that it is considered "uncool" to study or enjoy school. Fridman stated that "For America's sake, the anti-intellectual values that pervade our society must be fought" (258). Although rebuilding our educational system will involve we as a people focusing on many different issues: I believe we must first start within our own homes, implement year around schooling, and focus on our society and the role it plays in what our children value.

Our parents have a vast role on our values as our learning begins with them and they are our first teachers. My mother instilled the importance of education within me at a very young age. I was praised for excelling in school and was taught to do my homework before anything else. Unfortunately not all children are as lucky as I was. I believe that if a child is not taught the value of education within their own home then they will be less likely to succeed in school. It is difficult for a child to believe in themselves if they do not have someone else to believe in them. Fridman stated in his essay that "typical parents are ashamed of their daughter studying mathematics instead of going dancing, or of their son reading Weber while his friends play baseball" (258), I don't necessarily believe this statement to be true. Although I'm sure there are fathers that were "jocks" in high school who would be disappointed if their son was uninterested in sports, I don't believe that is a "typical" problem in the average American household. I do however believe that many parents are apathetic when it comes to their children. It wouldn't matter if that child was involved in sports or books because either way they would go unnoticed. This apathy is an epidemic sweeping through our na-

tion. However children who do not get support at home can still find support in our educational system through our teachers which is why America should hold the faculty members of our nation's schools in a higher regard.

When I was a child attending school in California I went to school year around. I still attended school the same amount of time as other students across the country but my school year was split up in segments. I would have several three week breaks throughout the school year instead of a three month summer break. I know that in some countries the school years are longer but year around schooling is another option. During the summer it is easy to get used to the relaxation and freedom, causing children to look upon the coming school year with dread. When I was attending year around I didn't have time to get too comfortable at home because I had a much shorter break from school. If this system was nationwide instead of state to state then maybe children would stay more focused on schooling, be less likely to forget the information they have learned, and not look at school as an inconvenience after their summer of freedom has come to an end.

Society and the mainstream media are also playing a large role in how children view education. Television is where most children learn a majority of their knowledge and by sending the message that being a "geek" or someone interested in an education makes you less cool then your peers is going to affect the way a child approaches learning. When I was a child I remember movies such as "Revenge Of The Nerds" or "The Breakfast Club" where each student was classified with a certain label and that sent the wrong impression. Luckily in the early 80's main-

stream television didn't seem to have the impact that it does today so I still excelled in school and studied despite the labels I had learned. However this type of programming may still be affecting our nation's youth today. Fridman states "There are very few countries in the world where anti-intellectualism runs as high in popular culture as it does in the U.S." (257). When I turn on the television I don't see very many TV series or movies that idolize the educated or show the true value of an education. Our country is currently in an economic crisis and without a proper education simply meeting ones basic needs is difficult but that message is not displayed in the media. I decided to attend college when I realized that the jobs I was qualified for could not meet my basic needs and the cost of living continues to rise, therefore, I felt my future would become bleak unless I sought a degree. I'm glad that I realized this before it was too late however feel I could have reached this conclusion long ago if it was better expressed to me in some form or another.

It is no secret that something needs to change within our educational system to keep children in school and pursuing a higher education. Many higher paid positions in our country are filled by people of other nations simply because they are more educated. Fridman states it simply by saying "Do we really expect to stay afloat largely by importing our scientists and intellectuals from abroad, as we have done for a major portion of this century, without making an effort to also cultivate a pro-intellectual culture at home?" (258). I am not against citizens of other countries coming to America for a better life and I am grateful that those educated men and women are helping our country thrive; but I believe that the value of education

should be instilled within our American children so they may lead our country in science or mathematics.

Our nation's leaders continue to mention education reform, but I have yet to see it. If reform means more funding for our schools, longer school years or a year around school system, parents playing a more active role in their children's education, or a change in the way our media projects education and its importance, then somehow we as a people need to embrace some of these reforms. We as a people need to help in the fight for our coming generations so one day we can say that America is one of the world leaders in education.

Holding The World In Your Hands

Amanda Winchester



The most amazing part of reading is the ability to be transported to other worlds. As you enter the worn pages of a novel you are instantly transported to a land called Narnia, seeing the horrors of Auschwitz through a young woman's eyes, or feeling the hairs on the back of your neck stand up as Stephen King weaves tales of suspense and terror. Much like Eudora Welty, the author of the essay "One Writer's Beginnings", the value of reading and writing was instilled in me at a young age. Welty relays her personal love of literature beginning with how her mother read to her and taught her the value of books by stating "I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to"(298). Reading for me has been an ongoing adventure, an escape, and a way to accumulate knowledge. Books have been my salvation in life, guiding me through a world of imagination and allowing words to come to life in my mind. My journey through literature in my life is much like a novel. It has a beginning, middle, and a conclusion but like a great novel there is no real end because the pages

become a part of you and are forever burned into your memory. My beginning was my mother reading to me as a child, my middle was incorporating reading and writing into my education, and my conclusion is how reading still illuminates my life today and will continue to grow and age with me.

My mother began teaching me the value of literature and reading at a young age including while I was still in her womb. She would simply read whatever piece of literature she was reading at the time aloud, be it a newspaper or a novel. As a child, after slipping into my pajamas, I would be taken to worlds with mythical creatures and adventures as my mother's soothing voice called out to me from the edge of my bed. Welty had a similar relationship with her mother that she portrayed in her essay by stating "She'd read to me in the dining room on winter afternoons in front of the coal fire, with our cuckoo clock ending the story with "Cuckoo," and at night when I'd got in my own bed"(298). Due to my mother's diligence in instilling the value of reading upon me I began reading at an advanced level at the age of five, writing short stories by the age of six, and began reading novels by the age of seven. Unlike most children I would rather get lost within the pages of a book than watch television. While other children were playing outside I was lying on the couch reading a book. Although I did play outside and watch television my favorite activity was reading. I was an introverted child and reading became my escape from the silence that filled my days. Words and images danced through my head as I happily read hour after hour until reluctantly I would have to stop reading for the day, because while I had become lost in a world of fantasy, dusk had settled

around me. Although I had gained a sense of independence when it came to reading my mother still wanted to be a part of my education so I began reading to her when I no longer needed her to read to me. She would always be the first person to read my short stories, which she still has in a dust covered box in her closet. Our library includes aging books from my childhood, some are falling apart, the binding no longer holding the pages within, but my mother saved every one of my childhood books. She never believed in throwing literature away. I was curious of my mother's past because of her deep love of literature and vast knowledge so I conducted an interview with her. My mother, Ms. Judy Domschke stated "When I was a child I had books bought for me before I was born, my favorite novels were the Laura Ingalls Wilder "Little House on The Prairie" series"(11/29/2012). Although she doesn't remember whether or not her parents read to her it appears the values bestowed on her were the same ones she passed onto me. Even now as I have grown into adulthood she still recommends novels to me because she reads almost every day. Although I don't read as often as I did as a child, I have comfort in the realization that anytime I want to expand my knowledge or briefly visit an alternate reality I can always pick up a book and lose myself in the intricate web of its words.

As I began school my love for reading intertwined with my education and I was no longer simply reading for pleasure but reading for an educational purpose as well. My teachers would give us a syllabus for the year with a list of all the books we were expected to read, and I would quickly embark on reading each book on the list and have them read be-

fore the school year was finished. I didn't read the books just because they were assigned; I enjoyed the opportunity school gave me because it introduced me to books I may not have previously heard of. Journeying through the racism and child-like innocence in "To Kill a Mockingbird" or reading the tragic play of the star-crossed lovers "Romeo and Juliet", I began to enhance both my reading and writing skills. I realized that I enjoyed learning about different cultures and religions so National Geographic became a permanent fixture in our household. I expanded my library from primarily fiction to non-fiction and autobiographies as well. Research assignments gave me the opportunity to share the courage of Abraham Lincoln in the face of a nation divided and try to decipher Einstein's theory of relativity. As my reading skills rapidly developed I began reading more advanced novels and soon developed a list of novels I wanted which were bought for me throughout the year. Welty had a similar experience stating "I was presented, from as early as I can remember, with books of my own, which appeared on my birthday and Christmas morning. Indeed, my parents could not give me books enough."(301). I was reading at such a rapid rate I would find myself re-reading books because I had exhausted all other options, including the library at school and at home. When I was nine my mother presented me with a library card and a whole new world was soon available at the tips of my fingers. I would leave the library with a stack of books I could barely carry both for personal use and educational use. English became my favorite subject as well as my strongest and an advanced use of literature was born. My interest in many different forms of literature may also be a trait I learned from my

mother, in the interview she stated “I have always had many different interests and enjoyed cultivating my knowledge. I have books ranging from Einstein’s Biography, Egyptian Hieroglyphics, and Henry Kissinger’s book on foreign policy”(11/29/2012). Due to multiple interests and my ability to comprehend the words presented to me I advanced in English courses as well as excelled in subjects such as Science and History. I received excellent marks in school and much of that success is credited to my mother for being my first and most important teacher.

Reading and writing remain a strong influence in my life and will continue to grow and age with me. I still read to escape or to relax, to learn new things even if they are not assigned, and to excel in school. I have read many novels throughout my life and get introduced to new authors and novels every day. My reading skills have given me an extensive vocabulary and the ability to portray my words in an articulate manner. Unlike Eudora Welty writing is not my number one passion, however I still continue to write short stories as a hobby. I agree with Welty’s statement “I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me-as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting-into knowledge of the word, into reading and spelling, by way of the alphabet” (301). I am forever grateful to my mother and could not imagine a world without books. Many people in America are still illiterate, meaning they cannot read or write, and I cannot imagine that type of lifestyle. For me not being able to get lost in a book would plunge me into a world of dark loneliness. Although I don’t read as often as I once did, I still cherish every moment I’m holding a world between my hands. Age has made me more extroverted and be-

cause of that I have less time to myself than I once did but that does not prevent me from opening a new novel or even re-reading one of my favorite novels. Stephen King’s “The Stand” is one of my favorite books, it’s over 1000 pages in length and I have read it at least seven times throughout the years. Some books are like movies, even though you have seen them once you are still compelled to watch them again. One of the wonderful elements of a novel is that every time you read it you discover something new, something that you may have missed the first time reading it but caught the second or third time. Novels are not only created by the author that wrote them but also by the imagination you bring with you while reading them. It’s in our imagination that characters develop features and come alive. Words turn to images and play across a screen within our mind truly transporting us to another world. That is the true gift of reading and will forever evolve throughout one’s lifetime.

I know I will take the knowledge that novels have given me and utilize it for the rest of my life; however, our current society is more concentrated on social media than the value of books. I feel lucky that I know and understand the value of a novel and what it means to read instead of just watching television. I have heard the statement “Why should I read the book when I can just watch the movie?” many times and it saddens me because that statement in itself sums up society as a whole. I was lucky to have an upbringing that is similar to Welty’s. Many of my peers did not grow up in an environment where they were read to or taught the importance of literacy, which is now causing them to struggle in their academic careers. Welty stated that “Learning stamps you with its mo-

ments. Childhood's learning is made up of moments. It isn't steady. It's a pulse."(302). I grew from a curious child constantly wanting to travel to new and exciting worlds, to a dedicated student, and now to a literate adult with a deep appreciation for novels. I began my literary journey while still within the womb, then craved being read to as a child. As I grew I became more literate and no longer needed to rely on others to convey the words within a book to me and with that knowledge continued to read for pleasure and for educational purposes throughout my life. As I am now attending college a new world has opened up before me once again. I now have the chance to read new novels assigned to me and study courses that were not available to me in high school. A rich culture of history, science, and advanced English courses awaits me as I proceed through school towards my degree. Due to my upbringing and an innate love of literature I will always have a love of books, a love that Welty portrayed perfectly by stating "Yet regardless of where they came from, I cannot remember a time when I was not in love with them-with the books themselves, cover and binding and the paper they were printed on"(298). Although I have reached adulthood, my love of novels and my experience with literature is just beginning. Like the world around us what we read and learn is forever growing and changing.

My Treasure Box

Amanda Winchester



An empty box is nothing more than a box, a void lacking true substance. It is the belongings that are kept within the box that breathe life into it. My treasure box was given to me by my mother when I was a young child. When it was given to me it was nothing more than an empty box, but soon it was filled with warmth of a family, earning the title of my treasure box. A title that it still holds to this day. Handcrafted in Poland, it first made its way into a small shop on a narrow cobblestone street of Vienna, Austria. The box's artistically handcrafted wood and intricate copper design immediately caught my mother's eye. She purchased the item, not knowing at the time that one day it would hold her daughter's most valuable possessions. The box was flown from the streets of Vienna, Austria to the streets of San Diego, California and eventually made its way to my delicate hands and curious eyes. Although the box itself has its own story and journey it's the contents which have slowly seen an increase as time and loved ones have passed in which the real treasure lies and the story of a family and its history is told.

The items inside were slowly gathered over time, each item chosen by me as a symbol of the people that I loved. Only the people that knew the story of each

item could see why I referred to the boxes contents as treasure. Every time I open my treasure box I remove each item gently, studying each item in detail as if I am seeing the object for the first time. Each time a new addition to my box is added I carefully find a place for my new treasure making the moment resemble a ceremonial event. The items were usually collected by me after a close family member passed on. Before the other members of the family had a chance to go through the deceased belongings I would quietly gather the items I wanted to keep, each item chosen with care as a reminder of my loved one and what they meant to me.

The treasure box slowly turned into a museum of history and a memorial to the dead. After my grandfather died, when I was only seven years old, my additions to my box became less and less frequent. My grandfather was the last of the influential people in my life to die during my childhood. Unfortunately I experienced many deaths during my early childhood, so my treasure box grew rapidly with the personal belongings of those that once surrounded me. The handcrafted box held symbols of aunts, uncles, cousins, and most importantly my grandmother and grandfather. Among these items there are three I value the most, these three items include a watch that my grandfather wore every day from the time it was given to him until his death, love letters written between my grandfather and my grandmother prior to their marriage and throughout their union every time they were apart, and my grandfather's hand held bible that symbolized his unconditional faith in God.

Each moment in history whether it is large or small happens at an exact moment and it was my grandfather's watch that revealed each of these moments to

him. My grandfather's watch fit his personality almost perfectly as if the watch itself was made for him, with its thin silver band and wind up clock it was simple yet showed a sense of taste. Even with its thin band it was strong, durable, and has withstood the test of time. My grandfather was a quiet man and like him there was nothing flashy about his favorite watch. Yet something about the watch still caught the attention of others, making people want to study it further. As a child, I would run my fingers over the silver band, tracing with my finger the small strip of gold that ran down the middle and getting lost in the abyss of the black face with its silver numbers shining against the darkness. My grandfather would let me study his watch often, as I carried it around the house enjoying the sense of comfort it gave me and the feeling of importance I had knowing that I was entrusted with such a valuable possession. The watch had been a birthday gift from my grandmother many years before my existence. He wore that watch on his wrist during the birth of two of his three children, multiple anniversaries, birthdays, and even the day I came into this world. As a child, I don't remember him taking the watch off unless he was allowing me to study it. Wearing it was a constant reminder of the love shared between him and my grandmother. The hands on the clock kept the time of the most important events of his life, the watch was still ticking and keeping time the moment he died. After his death, the watch became a memory of him that I could touch and hold. I wore it on my wrist as he did on his until the moment it finally stopped ticking in that moment it became another treasure that resides in the wooden box next to the other treasures so he will always be with his family.

The love letters between my grandparents were one of the first additions to my treasure box, reading their words is like traveling back in time and seeing the love between them being born. The letters are a testament to time and the romance of another era. During the Great Depression there was not solid work in the city of Traverse City, Michigan where my grandparents began dating at the young age of eighteen. My grandfather, not yet married to my grandmother, often had to travel to find work. During these times apart they kept their love for one another alive by corresponding with letters. They wrote a letter for each day they were apart but now only few of those many letters still exist. As you open the letters you are reminded of their age, the paper once white is now a dull yellow, written in pencil the writing is now smeared and barely legible in certain spots, they now possess a stale yet almost sweet scent that takes you back in time. The creases show that the letters have been open time and time again and the paper has become almost translucent with the passing of time. I don't open them anymore due to their fragile state, but I have read them so often the words and the love within the words are forever burned into my memory. My grandparents decided to get married through the letters that carried their love across the states and when the Depression finally ended and work became more available they no longer needed parchment to confess their love for one another. Yet, a part of their love remains alive through the words they wrote so long ago and those words reside within my treasure box filling the box with love that transcends the passage of time.

The most valued possession in my treasure box is my grandfather's

handheld Bible. He carried that Bible with him throughout his life as a testament of his faith in God and lived his life by the words written within. The Bible could fit into ones pocket, with its leather binding and now crumpling pages. The protective pages of his Bible have grown brown with age, but the white pages within still hold their color although feel like they may tear upon the slightest touch. Each time you unlatch the book and open it, a fine dust billows out as the pages slowly deteriorate to nothing. The Bible was given to him by his father and, upon his death, given to me. It can no longer be used for personal reading of scripture, but emanates a strength and power as most relics do. My grandfather was a devout Christian, always treating others with kindness and respect, never judging, his faith never wavering not even when his wife was taken and he fell ill shortly after. Although my grandfather had a tremendous amount of faith in God he would never preach, he allowed each person to carry their own beliefs and would never push his faith upon others. Due to his silence, I still do not know if his belief was innate or passed to him from his father as the Bible was. I remember my grandfather silently reading that small Bible and underlining passages that held special meaning to him. Although family was my grandfather's primary source of strength, I believe that his Bible was a great source as well. When my grandfather died the small Bible was clutched in his hands and I imagine holding it brought him a sense of peace as he passed on. His Bible was one of the last items placed in my treasure box, although a few things have been added throughout the years, a part of me feels that my grandfather was the last piece of my heart that needed to be added to the box in or-

der for it to be complete.

An empty box is nothing more than a box, it is the belongings that are within that give the box its life and its value. The treasures found in my treasure box would not be treasures to anyone else, the treasure doesn't necessarily even lie within the item itself but the memory that each item conjures in my mind. By collecting the belongings of those most important to me, I am collecting symbols, memories, and pieces of history. Although there are many items in my treasure box my three favorite items symbolize time and the family that was created within that time, a love story that stretches across decades, and the faith on which my family lived and died. A family legacy can fit inside a box if you choose the right objects to place within.

