

MWSU
2018/2019



*Discovering
the Student,
Discovering
the Self*

English 100 Student Essays

Department of English and Modern
Languages

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 2018 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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PLACE

My Father's House

Terry Butler

"This place to me was more than it looked.

It made me feel strong and the house is filled with love."

A significant place to me is my father's house. My father is a very unorthodox man. He has built beautiful houses all across the city so you would think his house would be even better than beautiful. Some of the houses he built were fifty yards wide and fifty feet tall. Some of the houses would even have appliances and add-ons as big as another house. Brand new modern walls and windows that cost thousands of dollars. Also fresh paint, the kind of indoor-outdoor paint that with the crisp color schemes spelled out wealth. News flash, my father's house was very old and dull; not many people could have made it from my father's house, the place I called home. Conditions were very different there, but there I learned to cook all on my own, to overcome an identity theft, and to develop trust in my close family members.

Yellow chips and brittle blue paint. 7314 Virginia Ave is where I resided. Surrounded by tree roots, vines, and weeds was my father's house. Old broken cement stairs shattered like glass across the pavement, I always had to be careful walking in. If I didn't watch my step I would fall. Definitely, if I were too busy listening to the dog's bark, I could just peek, and I might trip and fall. Those stairs were nothing comical. The only way to open the screen door at my father's house is brute force. I mean, a person has to yank the door like they're saving the world. I didn't have to be the strongest, but it did take strength. It was like there was a particular technique; a person must twist to the right, but not too hard and then to the left. Finally, they must lift upwards, and release quickly. Boom!! The door is open. Once you solve the mystery of the screen door, the main door required two separate keys for the top and bottom lock. My dad always said, "Better safe than sorry". Once I opened the door, I learned the specific keys to life.

I learned how to become a man, to be independent and to learn to get things done on my own. My father is a bachelor; the nights were long and the days were young. He was a vampire in the night. My father worked all morning, slept all day and enjoyed his leisure through the night. So, this meant he would work all morning, sleep through the day, and party all through the night. At a very young age I was on my

own. Days I would go into the fridge and there would be nothing there but bologna and tortilla chips or everyone's favorite Ramen noodles. My dad made sure I saved money; I used, it to buy myself groceries. If not I learned to create meals on my own. In my father's kitchen, I taught myself how to cook fried chicken, chicken Alfredo, homemade spaghetti and more. The kitchen much like the rest of the house wasn't anything special as far as appearance. No matter what day of the week there were always dishes in the sink. The smell was never terrible, but the smell from last night would stay there until the next night. The fridge had been a recycled fridge from a fire so it wasn't a pretty one. My father did put in brand new countertops; being a very strange and particular man he would always say, "Boy I can't stand this old dirty countertop. That is all these kitchen needs." He definitely made sure we got our countertops. The kitchen was my creation center. Various times I learned to do things on my own. I started to wash the dishes, clean the fridge and more all because of the conditions. This made me feel independent; it taught me that no one could stop me, and I don't need help to accomplish things on my own.

I also learned how to bounce back or to overcome what many setbacks my family and I had in that house. Less than a year ago my family and I almost lost it all due to identity theft. Some person from Detroit got a hold of my father's social security and took out several credit cards in our name. Somehow we owed the IRS thousands of dollars. At this time we were low. Meals per week were limited and it felt like there was no one but us vs the world. My father had so much pride he couldn't lose for long. My sister and I worked sixteen-hour shifts and overtime hours for a temporary service. Only God knows how much I hated that job. The job was a sixteen hour overnight shift lifting and unloading furniture out of trucks. It was very physical and inconvenient. To keep my house to continue to be a being in this world I did what I had to do; eventually, we were able to come up back on our feet because of hard work. My family depended on me and I depended on them, which leads me to my next point.

I learned to gain trust in my intermediate family members. My sister and I and my father lived together in that house for ten years. Everything we did was as a team and benefited each other. To buy new things we worked together. In order for me to go to school my father and sister both worked crucial hours to make money for me. On the other hand, while I trust them to provide financially, they trusted me to stay on top of my money and schoolwork in case of emergencies. I remember a time my sister's car was stolen. My sister is a resource in our family, we needed her. She lived in Houston and during the

hurricane, her car gave out. While it was sitting in the lot it was stolen. So my dad and I combined for enough money to buy her a new car. The house made our bond stronger.

Lastly, my father's house was a very significant place for me. This house shaped me into the person I am today. There are many more things I learned from the experience in my father's house. This place to me was more than it looked. It made me feel strong and the house is filled with love. No matter what I know that once I go into my house is safe because it taught me and my family that we can always count on each other. It taught me that I can always do things without the help of others as well, and lastly, I know that I can overcome near anything with my family behind me.

My Special Place

Audrey Edwards

“That is a small piece of the masterpiece that is Baltimore. Sure it has its rough sides, but if you look beyond that you can find so much more.”

I was born and raised in Baltimore, Maryland. When most people think of Baltimore, they think of a crime ridden, unsafe place. Sure it has a bad side, but when you look past all of that, you find a beautiful, fascinating, and wonderful city. When you wake up in the morning you can hear the harbor alive with fishermen talking about the biggest fish they ever caught, the gentle hum of boat motors, and the ocean softly lapping against the shore. Walking down the old Baltimore roads you’ll find stores that have been in the same place for more than 30 or 40 years, townhouses so close together you almost can’t tell them apart, and a seafood restaurant every ten feet. Baltimore taught me to always look for the good in life, through the positive activities I engaged in, by finding and being grateful for the value in the small things, and through the relationships I had.

When I was born, my parents were living in a townhouse, and my dad was attending The Peabody Institute of The John Hopkins University getting his doctorate in piano. My mom got to stay home and look after me. Before I was born, it was just my parents and a cat named Spot. When I came around, Spot took it upon himself to adopt me as his own. He would let my parents near me, but when a guest would come to our house he would sit in front of me and puff up and hiss if they go too close to me. As the years went by, my two brothers were born, and another cat entered our home. We didn’t have much of a backyard at our house, just a small hill. Our front yard, though, was the place of our many adventures across distant lands filled with dragons and princesses.

Our summer days were spent in that yard, running around, riding bikes, or sitting in one of those plastic kiddie pools you get from Walmart. When it was too hot to go outside, the mall or the Aquarium were perfect places to cool off. At the mall, we enjoyed walking around the Build-A-Bear store, throwing coins in the fountain, or getting a pumpkin muffin at Panera with our Aunt Julie. However, the Aquarium was always my favorite. I could spend all day there, admiring the wonderful creatures that swam in the mighty sea right next to us. I was especially fond of the gigantic whale suspended above the Aquarium

entrance, and of the tank that held the barracudas. Those summers in Baltimore were wonderful, and they will always have a special place in my heart.

Winter in Baltimore was like stepping into Narnia. You would go to bed one night with just a light dusting of diamond-like snow, and wake up to a 10 or 12 inch blanket of clean, white marshmallow fluff. Every tree in the neighborhood would be covered in ice and snow, making them look like glass sculptures that should have been put in a palace. All the shops and schools for miles would be shut down, and you wouldn't see a car driving down the roads for the first few days. Everything was silent, like the world had simply gone to sleep for just a little bit. My brothers and I would get out our sleds and put on anything that would keep us warm for a few hours, and storm outside ready for a day of intense winter fun. We would sled down our small hill, build blob-like snowmen, or make dainty snow angels only to be destroyed by our sledding. When the evening came and we could no longer feel any part of our body, we would trudge inside and drink warm milk and then take a warm bath to try and regain the feeling of our toes and fingers. We would slip into our pj's and run downstairs and rap up in a blanket to read a story with our parents. Then off to bed to get rest before our routine would start again in the morning. Summer will always be my favorite season, but winter in Baltimore was a paradise no words could describe.

My first friend growing up in Baltimore, was a girl in my Sunday school class. We became fast friends after we each found out our intense love for Macaroni and Cheese. We spent every possible minute together, we would only sit next to each other in church, we would ride our bikes to each others house, and we would both eat Mac and Cheese on rainy days when we couldn't play outside. I remember one time, our families had suggested that we go for a hike in the woods a few miles outside of Baltimore. The crisp fall air made for the perfect day for a hike, and the perfect day for lots of adventures. As we hiked we saw the great pine trees rising above the clouds to distant lands, heard every sound of the wildlife around us like a strange orchestra, and the smell, the smell of earth and life all around us. The smell of recent rain, mixed with fresh dirt and moss, made for a smell so rich and powerful it sent chills up and down my spine. Our senses heightened, my friend and I set off to find dragons and fairies hidden in this mighty forest. We came to a stream and found frog eggs, we both loved anything slimy and we both wanted a pet frog. Obviously we wanted to take the frog eggs home, however, we were discovered when

the eggs started falling out of our pockets. Placing them carefully down in the stream, we began our trek home. We were about half way back, when we all heard twigs snapping just to the left of us. My friend and I thinking it had to be a unicorn or some other magical beast, crept slowly behind a tree to get a better look at what it was. It turned out to be a bunch of deer, disappointed, but still intrigued, we crept slowly to these majestic creatures. I will never know why the deer didn't move, but they didn't, and we got ever closer to them. We were about 10 feet from a beautiful doe, when she suddenly looked at me, tilted her head, and made her way silently over to me. Not wanting to scare her away, I stayed completely still as she slowly circled around me, sniffing my clothes and hair, before moving back to her group. For the next week, the encounter with the deer was the only thing my friend and I could talk about. We figured it had to be some kind of magic, obviously, and told anyone at church that would listen about our epic adventure. This was our friendship, always jumping into the world of our imagination, making every one of our stories way more epic with the art of exaggeration, telling each other everything, and making sure that our friendship stayed that way forever. From fighting over the most awesome puzzle in Sunday school, eating ice cream on the curb on a hot summer day after riding our bikes, skinned knees and mud fights, late night talks about how we had each accepted Christ as our Savior, and discovering the moon jellyfish that come out at night near the harbor. She always saw the good in every situation even when something didn't go super great. She really showed me that even when life could be falling apart around you, there is always the silver lining somewhere, and that we should always try to see the good in everything. She made Baltimore even more special to me, by being there when I was upset, and by being happy with me when I was happy. This was my best friend, and she impacted me more than she could ever know.

Baltimore is so much more than a News Flash on Fox 4 about another shooting. Baltimore is having friends that are so close that they are basically family, it's late night beach walks next to the harbor, it's the lights in the city, it's the hot summer day sun and the cold winter snow, it's my home. Since I have moved away from Baltimore, I have really noticed the impact it had on my life. I haven't really thought about that impact until recently, seeing all of the news about Baltimore, and hearing how it is a bad city. That is a small piece of the masterpiece that is Baltimore. Sure it has its rough sides, but if you look beyond that you can find so much more. When I was living there, I saw only the good in that city, moving

here I see the side that most others see. It may seem silly but that city really taught me to always look for the good in life, living there I got to experience a side of Baltimore that is not seen very often. I was very young, so I cannot say that I have seen everything positive and negative in Baltimore. The parts I did see, though, were really good. I think that every place has a good side, if you really look for the good in it, or if it left a positive impact on you in some way. You don't need to have lived in a place for a good portion of your life for you to really understand and find the good in it. Your special place could be a park in your neighborhood, a family vacation spot, or your hometown. When a place impacts you in a good way, it is very easy to see the good in everything there. When I think of my home, I remember my friends, I remember the countless hours playing outside, the salty ocean air in the morning, and the lights of the city at night. It may not be the greatest city, but Charm city will always be my home.

The Place That Has My Heart

Bailey Gilbert

*“The track helped me gain motivation, focus, and strength
that I never knew I had in me.”*

“I am going to smile like nothing is wrong, talk like everything is perfect, act like it is all a dream, and pretend like it is not hurting me.” I saw this quote online, and the first time I read this quote, it put into words how I really felt growing up. I was raised in a household where my parents constantly fought. They always fought about money, and it was always started by my dad. When this would happen, I would try to get away from all the screaming and terror that being at the house gave me. Trying to get away, I would go on runs around the neighborhood. Eventually when I turned 16 and could drive, I would drive to my school track where I could clear my head. The fighting grew worse, and I found myself going there every day. My parents eventually got a divorce, crushing me, and I still kept finding myself going to that track. I am not a person to open up to people and talk to my family or friends, so going to the track was kind of like a therapy treatment. I would get all of my frustration, angry, or whatever other emotion I had out of me. I like being by myself with a quiet environment, and that was how it felt when I would go to the track. The track always felt like home and was a go-to place where I could clear my head because that is where I was motivated to succeed in this sport, release built up emotion, and shaped me into a better and happier person due to the positive environment.

Getting away from the terror in the house and going to the track motivated me and helped me be successful. I would always practice my events that I would perform during meets, so I worked on triple jump, long jump, and sprints when I would go to the track. In order to be successful, I needed to work on my form of each of the events, as well as getting into shape. I found myself doing these almost daily, and it would take my mind off of everything that had been happening back at the house. It was terrifying being around my dad. The most impactful story that motivated me in track was the morning of the KCI Conference track meet. It started off with my dad yelling at my mom. I was trying to get focused and ready because this was a big and important meet. I somehow got in the middle of them fighting, and almost got hit by a shoe and a hanger. My dad threw them, aiming for my mom about hitting me. He did eventually

hit my mom with a sweatshirt, and I was petrified. That day, when I was competing, I won triple jump, breaking a new record. Keeping motivated, the fight that morning didn't go through my head, until my last event. I went over to my head coach, who was working high jump with my dad, telling him that I won and beat a record in excitement. My dad started screaming at me, in front of everybody. He was in a bad mood, and nobody could figure out why. I started bawling from fear and disappointment, and I still had to run the 100-meter dash. I ended up false starting because I couldn't get the screaming and the fight out of my head. Since then I never looked back and I never let him affect me. Focusing on these events with my motivation, helped me win state and get a college scholarship. I wanted to win state so bad that I didn't have time to focus on all of the fighting happening back at home. I had to completely block all of it out and worry about what I needed to get done in order to win. It was tough to achieve, but every day I was at the track, I was reminded of how bad I wanted it and that I had no control on what was happening back at home, which motivated me to perform to my best ability during my events.

I do not do well talking about how I feel with my family, friends, or a therapist. I didn't think it was any of their business. The only way I felt like I could totally express my feelings was through track. When I would sprint, I would release anger I had towards my dad and how he treated and abused my family. Anger he gave me, when he told my mom that everything was her fault. Depression was released through me by running miles after miles. The guilt and sadness I had through the whole fighting and divorce. I still get depression and anxiety because he doesn't want to have anything to do with me. Walking or just being out there doing something would reduce the stress that was built up from everything in life. Being at the track helped me through so much. I will always remember the day where my dad screamed at me in front of my whole team during track practice. I literally did nothing, and he just kept screaming at me saying I sucked and that I had no reason being there. He built up so much emotion in me that day, that I didn't think I had. That's when I went out to the track sprinted fast, feeling like I was getting all of my anger out, realizing that I just found a therapy treatment for me. That day will never be forgotten. Being at the track really helped me liberate all the built-up emotions. The track helped me gain motivation, focus, and strength that I never knew I had in me.

The best thing that happened through this difficult time was how positive the track environment was. Most of my teammates were wonderful. All track practice we would talk about track or what we wanted to eat that night. The coaches were like the father figures I never really had. They actually cared

about my education, health, and athletics. They were father figures to everyone, not just me. I remember one track meet where one of my teammates forgot money. We ended up going to Taco Bell that night after the meet, and my coach was the first one to step up and offer money to feed her. They did that anytime somebody forgot money. I loved all of my coaches. The best thing in this positive environment though, is all of the wonderful new people I met. I have made many new friendships and still talk to them daily. They are some of the best friendships I have, too. The positive environment was very special to me. It took weight off my shoulders I had from all of the horror my dad gave me back at home. The positive environment on the track impacted my life tremendously by meeting new friends and having coaches who helped me get through the difficult times.

I fell in love with this sport for many reasons. I fell in love with the track, which became my go-to place to clear my head, because it gave me motivation, helped release emotions, and had a special environment. Track has helped me get through difficult times in my life. It has helped me not want to do things that I would regret. It helped me want to live a happy, loving, healthy life. Track has helped me realize that I have no control over certain things. I had no control over how my dad treated my family, and how he treated my mom. One thing that will always stick with me is when my mom said, "I will always be a shoulder for you to cry on. I will always be here for you no matter how bad life gets. Remember it is just only an obstacle in the road." I realize that all of this was a therapy session for me, and I couldn't be any more grateful. I keep reminding myself that everything will be all right. Maybe not today, but it will eventually.

My Grandparent's House

Yolande Kalenda

“That’s when I realized that going to Coco house wasn’t just about going to meet each other and just know each other but also to being family...”

Back in Africa, my grandparents lived in a village. The house was built with brown sand, containing a five-foot door and the sizes of the windows were like the takeaway boxes from the dining hall in Blum. When you get inside the house, there’s only a living room and the master bedroom, and the other bedrooms were outside. The house didn’t have electricity so the house was mostly dark inside unless it was lit up by candles. When you walk outside everything was green and beautiful because fruit trees surrounded the compound and it rained most of the time. My grandparent’s house was a place where you would meet every type of Chimanga. Yes, that’s what they used to call us. My parents used to take me and my siblings to my grandparent’s house to learn the importance of knowing how to cook, the importance of my family history, and the importance of being a Chimanga.

My grandparents are my father’s parents, we used to call them Coco and Mamu. They got married long before I was born and had ten children, four girls and six boys, and my father was the fifth oldest child. After years later their children grew up and almost all of them got married and had children: some of them had ten, some had two, some eight, some five, some twelve and my father had six. It was a big family full of grandchildren. As Coco always said, “The bigger we are the more blessings we’ll receive.” I remember one Saturday morning, my mother was preparing my older siblings to go to Coco’s house and when my father came to take them, he said that I should also go with them. That was the first time he ever said that because my mom used to say I was too young to go to Coco’s. The moment I heard that I got so excited as if I had won a lottery because that’s what it was to me, a lottery. I always admired my siblings going there. Going to Coco’s house meant a lot to me because my siblings used to come back with stories that Coco used to tell them and with excitement about how generous Coco was, so I wanted to see that with my own two eyes and later show off to my little brother Sam. I was around six years old, so I packed my stuff by myself and I followed my siblings.

As I peeped out the window of the car, I saw people about my age playing “Jeu de só”; it’s a game of ball, two people on each end throwing at each other the ball targeting the person in the middle. The young boys were playing soccer; I saw some that looked around my oldest sister Olive’s age in the kitchen preparing lunch and older boys playing checkers, and some had just arrived. I saw Coco running towards me with full of joy shouting my name “Yolanda wetu, Yolanda wetu” meaning our Yolanda. He grabbed me and gave me the smoothest hug ever. At that moment I was delighted with joy because I had finally met Coco. After a long playtime, I decided to see what they were cooking in the kitchen. It was located on the left side of the house. It’s not like the kitchens you would find in the cities with stoves, fridges and cabinets; the kitchen roof was built with coconut tree leaves with six poles that held the roof. The floor was hard soil like a tortoise shell. When I went inside, I found Laure, Olive, Judith and Mamu. Laure was pounding dried corn to make fufu. Olive was adding meat in the pot of cassava leaves pondu. Judith was making pepper soup of chicken while Mamu had started serving. As I was watching them they were sending me to get stuff like salt, water and tomatoes. When Laure started preparing fufu, she told me to pay attention carefully; that was because fufu is the big and main source of food. Part of being a wife, I had to know how to prepare it. “Fufu is what will hold your husband tight,” Mamu told me. Part of being an African girl is knowing how to cook African food for my future husband and it is one of the big parts of being a woman.

As Mamu was serving the food outside, two of my cousins and I put the mats down. It was like a festival; we had every type of food; allocos, briks, jollof rice, okra soup, pepper soup, afia efere, pondu, fufu and much more; we all sat on the sides of the mats surrounding the food. We were about twenty-seven children. My cousin Prince prayed for the meal then we all started eating; everyone was talking with everyone, and cracking jokes.

Few minutes later Coco came with a man. I asked my cousin who he was; she said Uncle Noël. He was about six-feet tall, looked like he weighted 201 pounds, with a beard and mustache like Ice Cube in “Ride Along” and dark brown hair. He had on brown shorts with a red t-shirt, “Where is Yolanda,” he said. He looked at me smiling, “Wow you look exactly like your mom.” Then he carried me on his shoulders and told the rest that we were going to the farm I thought the farm was a distance away but it was right behind the house. We started harvesting. Few minutes later, we went back to the house then Coco came and sat next to me and said, “I know you won’t grow up around here but there’s something you need to know

about the Chimanga.” He went on and said “You see how everyone is happy because they are here?” That’s what family is all about, staying united together. That’s when I realized that going to Coco house wasn’t just about going to meet each other and just know each other but also to being family, and spending the weekends there was to teach us how to value each other and knowing that we will always be there for each other “If you need help you will find your family at your neighbor’s door,” he said. He suggested a story about how hard it was for my parents to be together, war between the two tribes. He told me to call everyone because it was the beginning of the two different tribes and most of us were affected. After a while they came back, and washed their hands. We made a campfire and sat around it, then Coco started telling us the story.

Long time ago there were two twin princes that wanted to become king, but only one of them was supposed to inherit the throne so when the other brother saw that he chose to fight his brother but since it wasn’t part of their tradition the elders didn’t let him. He decided to take over half of the kingdom and rule it. It became the Luba and Karunda. Because of that history the two villages grew with hatred of each other. If any Luba was found in the Karunda village they were beaten to death; it went both ways. My mom is a Karunda while my father a Luba. Them being together was a taboo so they had to move away and get married. Why know all that? Well, he said, don’t you want to tell your future children interesting stories about your family history? “Yes,” I said I do want my future children to know about my tribes and how it started. Knowing my family history is knowing who I am. It’s part of my tradition.

Being African is not all about being born in Africa but knowing what it represents and stands for. I’m an African who knows how to cook and knows my heritage. It’s important because my culture prepares me for my future husband. My parents used to take me and my siblings to my grandparent’s house to learn the importance of knowing how to cook, the importance of my family history, and the importance of being a Chimanga. And because of that, my family tradition will keep on growing because I will tell my children, who will tell my children’s children my story. I’m Yolanda Kalenda Chimanga.

Room in the Basement

Titalia Long

“I decided I was not going to let that one man in that one room define who I am.”

Cold dark and terrifying, that’s what it was to me. A place of shame and fear, yet a place for learning and curiosity. A place that changed my life forever, for better and for worse. In order to minimize damage when the glass has been cracked, I must accept the problem, deal with the outcome, and then embrace the future. This is my place. This is my story.

During the summer of 2011, I was twelve and he was twenty-three. He was always the odd one out of the bunch. I think that’s what I liked so much about him . He was so mysterious. The way he spoke with so much confidence and knowledge made me think he could be a football commentator. I believed he was bright because his head was always in a book. This made me think he liked to read, or that he was studying something. The crowd he hung around was the exact opposite of him making me wonder why he hung-out with them at all. They reeked of marijuana and sex, while he smelled of strong masculine cologne. Their fashion was pants that sagged two feet below their belt and huge shirts if any. Polo shirts were his thing tucked, and creased pants.

He had his own room inside of our Grandma’s house, the room in the basement. He forbade anyone from coming in his room so no one did. It was a small room covered only by a thin, white, sheer curtain that hung from each end of the wall. In fact, it wasn’t a room at all; it was his dungeon. The floors were made of dust and dirt. The walls had so many cracks in them, you would think a demon was trying to break through. The deeper I walked into the dungeon, the harder it became to breathe or even think. The only thoughts that were going through my mind was how cold the breeze was as I got deeper and deeper into the basement. It was a disturbing presence. Spider webs stretched across the room. I began to wonder how can someone sweet as him could live in a place as haunted as this.

I was so enthralled with him. Why was he the way he was? At times, I would get too deep into thought, and he would catch me staring at him. I couldn’t pinpoint who he really was. I never noticed all the attention he gave me . He was family. One awful night the power shut off; Grandma forgot to pay the bill again. This didn’t stop my sister, my cousin, and me from having to spend the night because my dad was working a double shift. This particular day, something was off about him. He was so talkative and it made me wonder why? Usually, he spoke little but when he did it was powerful, but not today. What was going on ?

The day went by, and I still couldn't understand the reasoning for his actions. Bed time soon arrived, and the three of us slept on the only couch in the living room. The three of us lying down side by side looked like a human knot. Noticing that the couch was not big enough for the three of us, he came to help. He told us we looked silly and that we could sleep in his room; he would take the couch. My sister and cousin ran for the steps, eager to get in his bed. I followed along, but, I wasn't too eager. Rather I was frustrated with all the changes suddenly occurring in one day. As I headed for the steps, I stopped to turn and look at him, finding that he was looking at me too. I felt a chill in my body. He was staring through my soul. I turned my head and walked down all fifteen creaky steps. The steps had never seemed so long before. My head was spinning with questions and the first one was why I am here? I got to his room, and I didn't want to think anymore.

My sister and cousin were already lying side by side at the top of the bed sound asleep. I laid at the bottom of the bed, and before I shut my eyes, I looked around his room for anything that could give me a clue to who he really was. There was nothing; the walls were blank. That frightened me even more. I shut my eyes tight until I fell into a light sleep. Not long after, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I opened my eyes, and he was kneeling on the side of me. In that moment, I didn't know if I should be afraid or not. He calmed me down with the rhythm of his voice. It was soothing until I felt his hand go up my night gown and I froze. I could no longer think, I could no longer hear, I could no longer feel but somehow I heard the words he slowly spoke while moving his fingers in every part of my vagina. He asked, "Does it feel good?" Terrified, I replied, "I want to go to bed," and then he left. I started crying rivers and could not stop. Unable to go back to sleep, I stayed up the rest of that night staring at the walls in the room in the basement. Then it hit me I had been a victim of sexual assault.

Growing up young watching things like *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, I never expected something like that on tv could really happen to me. It did, and now, I was the one who had to deal with it. The next morning, my dad picked me up for a doctor's appointment. Before leaving, I pulled my cousin to the side and made her promise to keep everyone away from him. She asked what was wrong and I couldn't say at the time. She realized how alarmed I looked and agreed. I walked out the front doors and got into the car feeling nauseated with myself. I sat in the front seat and was silent the full drive. Luckily for me, my doctor was a woman, and so I was able to tolerate her hands on my body but barely. I had never felt more violated in one day ever. When I returned from my doctor's appointment my cousin was waiting on the front porch for me and quickly ran to me.

“Tell me what happened!” She yelled .

“Where is everyone?” I responded.

“They are at the park, now tell me. I’ve been giving him the stank look all day and keeping everyone away from him as you asked, now what is going on !”

“Last night-” I couldn’t finish, I started to cry.

“Did he rape you ?” She asked. I nodded my head no.

“Did he touch you ?” She asked. I nodded my head yes beginning to cry even harder.

“Where !” She yelled furiously. I pointed.

She hugged me tight and began walking quickly to the house. I begged her not to say anything and she said, “No, he can’t do this to you.” I explained to her that I had to be the one to tell and that I planned on saying something later that afternoon. I just needed time to figure out how I was going to say I had been molested.

That afternoon flew by more swiftly than normal. It was now time. My cousin took my hand and we walked up to my father together. We sat down as I began to tell the story. My dad apologized, but what was he apologizing for ? My dad hadn't done anything to me; it wasn't his fault. After our conversation, my dad made phone calls to tell the family. I felt the change, that from now on my family would look at me as a victim and would just feel sorry for me and I didn't want that. I wanted to be looked at as the same girl i've always been, but I wasn't.

After my dad finished with his phone calls he drove me to Jennings Police Department. Before exiting the car my dad asked, “Are you sure , you are telling the whole truth?” How can he say that ? Of course I was telling the truth ! I was upset that he would even ask that ! Did my own father not believe me ? If he doesn't, why would anyone else? I began to question if I wanted to move forward, but then I thought what would Olivia (from *Law and Order*) want me to do if she was here. After, I thought about my molester being there with my little brother and sister and I grew sick to my stomach. I wouldn't want them to go through what I had been through. I had to do this. I went inside the detective office and saw the detective was a man. Boy was I tired of seeing men. I gave him my story vaguely. He told me I had to be honest with him and he must know everything in order to help me. The only thing I kept thinking about was that he was a man. Who knows what he could be doing while he was off duty or maybe even while he was on. I guess the detective sensed I had a problem with giving him full descriptions because he was a male. So, he recommended I get some help. HELP! I didn't need help. What I needed was to be invisible to all men. Being a minor, it was not my choice to turn down help if my dad felt it was necessary. He did, and he took

me to counseling. We were going to counseling and the detective would be sitting in on the sessions. Meanwhile back at my grandmother's house, my molester was being arrested. I wasn't there to see his face, but my cousin told me how it had happened. As he was being handcuffed, my grandmother went over to him and slapped him. He smiled and said "I'm not the only one." What did he mean? Were more men in my family molesting girls? Who is a suspect and who is not? Till this day I have never found out what he had meant. However, he was gone and that was most important.

Counseling meetings were tough. They asked me all the questions I had heard on *Law and Order*. I didn't feel like this was real. They were treating me exactly how I didn't want to be treated. They all looked at me with concern and sorrow and asked me questions over and over again. After six meetings, I decided to open up and tell exactly how I felt and realized that all this time I had been angry with myself. I thought this was my fault. Unlike the victims in *Law and Order*, I had led my assaulter on. I started to cooperate. I did all the surveys that were asked of me and even acted out what happened on dolls. Each meeting got easier for me to tell my story. I felt better; I didn't feel like it was my fault anymore. I wasn't angry at my family for feeling sorry for me. I had to learn to move on. When the counselors saw improvement in my act they released me and I felt the strength the victims felt when defeating their case. That's what I had done, I defeated my own case and I was satisfied. Though, I still had a hard problem trusting men. I did not pursue taking my assaulter to court. I had already defeated him in my head. I couldn't look at him in a courtroom and let him rip my pride out my body once again. If I could go back and change anything it would be me not testifying.

Now that I had dealt with my baggage, it was time for me to move on. I used to play basketball when I was younger, not for myself, but for my dad. During that time, I decided I was going to do things that I wanted to do. I began cheering and started to express my love for styling hair. I became a more protective big sister to my siblings and developed a even stronger love for children. I want to teach and help younger people create a voice. I will help them to grow to be strong and smart. Hopefully, they will not have to experience what I had been through. I decided I was not going to let that one man in that one room define who I am.

The room in the basement helped carve my life. Although, it was a terrifying experience, I am not ashamed it happened to me. It occurred, I handled it, and I moved on. I used to get mad when the victims on *Law and Order* wouldn't tell their story. I thought what's so hard about it. Just say it. I now understand how much strength and

courage it took for them to get on a stand, something I did not do. Those girls weren't just victims; they were women, strong and powerful women.

Finger Lickin' Good

Katelynn Meyer

“From this job, I have learned many life lessons. I would not change this experience for anything in the world.”

Imagine it. Humid and muggy conditions from the constant temperature from the fryers. Sweaty from the mixture of the temperature inside and the weather outside. Hot grease boiling to extreme hot temperatures. Chicken with the herbs and spices aroma filling the air with scent.

Other products such as, potato wedges, and popcorn chicken being fried. Sides being made and waiting on patiently to be picked. No time for breaks. Time to meet the quota. That time is now. High intensity. Constant moving. Extreme stress. Jeff Bezo, the Amazon founder and CEO, started his career path out at McDonald's. One of the most successful and powerful companies that is used on a daily basis, started his first job at McDonald's. One's first job does not predict how successful one will be in life. The first job is the most memorable for most. For myself! learned many valuable lessons that have molded the person I am today and will never forget the place that helped me become this way. That is why this "place" is so significant to me. Just a few things I learned is how to cope with stress, how to prioritize my time and tasks, and how to work as a team to be successful.

My first job wasn't like any other office job, or any car dealership. My first job consisted of clothes drenched in the scent of chicken and constantly sweating. When summer came the restaurant was scorching hot and when the winters came the restaurant was just the right temperature to be comfortable. The building stood proud as if it were a statue ready to be worshiped due to the contents inside. Colonel Sanders would hold his smile as he stood, tall and thin, by the menu board that showed off all the products he was so delighted to advertise. When those big red doors opened and the breeze hit the inside, the only smell that would burst through the doors and windows was fried chicken. The fryers full of grease bubbling to be used. The clean, fresh lobby lonely from no customers ready to be used. The building being a foundation to where the chicken would be made and sold. If I were to walk by the cooks just slightly the herbs and spices would fill my nose enough to make me sneeze at least sixty times. The cookies would be made in the mornings as well, the mixture of spices and cookies, would be an odd combination but would

fill the store's brim in aroma. The restaurant was so quiet in the mornings compared to the chitter chatter of the customers in the busy hours. Well, To be fair, my first job was at KFC.

When I worked at KFC, stress was a huge part of the job. While working a high intensity and busy environment job, stress is going to be the biggest enemy. One day I worked at KFC our usual rush would come around 6:00 pm. The food would be prepped. The chicken would be fresh and hot filling the entire building with the herbs and spices. Customers would flood in the store and in the drive through area. I had more experience and excelled at my job, I worked drive-thru. One busy night I was working drive-thru and it had been a busier night than ever. My body felt as if it was drenched in sweat. Customers would give me their orders and the packers would make the orders. The coworkers that were packing made multiple orders wrong. Customers would rush through the door like a dog chasing his tail. They would demand the manager and demand their food or a refund. One customer had been so angry, she started to call me names such as "stupid" and "slow" and many more. At this point, I was already tired and aggravated with my coworkers. My manager could see the face of exhaustion and desperation. The face of defeat had taken over. My manager took the headset from me and told me to go calm down in the office. From the office I sat down taking deep breaths. In that moment of stress and desperation I came to realize that people say things they don't mean when they're upset or angry. After minutes of deep breaths, I came back refreshed and feeling better than ever. That experience taught me that I just needed to slow down and breathe and people may get upset and may say things but to keep on thriving. Thriving is important to me because it makes me have the motivation to keep going and not to give up. It also tells me that if I work harder the pay off will be better than any pay off ever received.

When working in the fast food industry, one of the most important factors is prioritizing. Prioritizing is putting tasks that may be more important before other tasks. It was hard to ration out time to do different tasks. When working in customer service, the customer is ALWAYS right no matter the circumstance and that the customer comes first. Customers help mold and fund the huge corporation I worked for. Without the customers there would be no KFC. Each and everyday I would go into work, I would go in full heart and full focus. I knew as soon as I went behind the counter that there was no time for games and fun. It was time to get to down to business. I was working one day and I had a few coworkers who decided to not work and goof around. For example, one of the coworkers was in the lobby mopping making the lobby smell as if a wet dirty socks were dragged right through it and over it at least

three times, while there were customers waiting in line on service. The other coworkers that were supposed to be helping me were goofing off and picking which order was easier to do and doing those first. While working drive-thru I had been drenched in sweat from head to toe from the outside weather constantly hitting my face, realized orders weren't going out as fast. I had checked on my other coworkers and realized exactly what they were doing. I started to tell them the harder tasks come before the easy tasks. I had no control over what they were doing nor could I instruct them to do their job. I was so frustrated at the amount of help that I was getting. I felt as if I was running a "one man show." I felt as if my face was so red with rage and my entire body slouched from desperation. At that point, I wanted to quit so badly. I wanted to say "Screw it" and walk right out those big red doors. I wanted to leave and never look back. When I finally got to sit down and think and recoup is when I came to the realization. This helped me realize even though I wanted to take the easy way out that it was easier to take it task by task no matter the difficulty. Also, taking time to do the task is a more efficient way than flying through each task. I learned that prioritizing time and tasks is not only in the workplace but in life in general.

While working at one of the most successful fast food chains in the nation, it does get really hectic. One of the issues that the place I worked at was scheduling. For example, when the big manager would be hiring and scheduling all these people to work and no one to show up. A normal work day would have five people working. There would be two on front counter, one taking orders and one packing, and two on drive-thru, one taking orders and one packing, and one cook. One day when I showed up it just happened to be my manager, the cook and me. My inner feelings were on edge. My manager seemed a little confused and panicked. Before the store opened we got together as a group and talked about an efficient way to serve customers and do such things with the amount of workers. Different tasks were assigned to different people working. With everyone doing those tasks and pulling their weight on the team it caused our location to have one of the highest amount of money made on that day. The only reason I knew this is because all of the KFC's had their data from the day printed out at the end of the night. The other KFC and the one I worked at, had friendly competitions to see who sold more. That day we most definitely won because the labor rate was down and sales were extremely high. This showed me that teamwork can really make a business successful if everyone puts in effort.

This significant place helped define the person I am today. I worked at this place throughout high school and on. This job gave me a little more insight on how to run a business. I learned to grow in this

place and what it takes to run a successful company. Many times the managers wanted to promote me to a manager as well but I was "too young" although very knowledgeable in the company. The managers taught me on the computers and other systems how to do things such as, take inventory, make a schedule, and planning budgets.

Overall, I did not realize how much could be learned in working in a fast food environment. One has to truly experience the job and the emotions to truly understand an author's point of view. Many moments I spent in that office absorbing many lessons. From this job, I have learned many life lessons. I would not change this experience for anything in the world. This job taught me more than I have ever learned in school. Not only did this job teach me how to cope with stress, how to prioritize my time and tasks, and how to work as a team to be successful, but this job showed me how to be a successful worker in the real world.

La Surdouée

Marianna Prost

*“The place became an obsession. I had to go there and make
some memories of my own.”*

“Home is where your heart is”, goes the famous saying. Heart doesn’t always have to be a person, at least for me it was not. Growing up in a small town with absent parents and smothering neighbors, I always dreamt of big cities where I could be free to be whoever I wanted to be: New-York, London, or Montpellier. Montpellier is the seventh biggest city in France, the city holds a very important place in my heart. Most of my relatives live around it and I used to spend most of my holidays over there to escape the country side. Once I got to live in Montpellier myself, I finally felt as if I could fit in somewhere.

I grew up in a small town no one ever heard of, Bourbon-Lancy, situated in the middle of France, where 75% of the population is over 70 years old. Most of the friends I made growing up were surrounded by their families. Families that had been living there for generations, whereas my family was new, and even after 18 years of living there, I felt like an outsider. I was familiar with the places, the park *Pucenat* on the hill, near my house, where I would spend all my Wednesdays or the theater next to the cathedral where I would performed at least twice every year. I know the town, I knew the town, but I was never made to be a permanent feature of it. From as far as I can remember I have always wanted to fit in. I try to say what people want me to say or do what they want me to do. Sadly, I have always stick out: I was too tall, too pale, didn’t have the right passions or hobbies, but mostly I was not dressed to impress them. I remember once at a small concert hold near the factory of the city, I was wearing a black tutu skirt Madonna or Carrie Bradshaw’s style-. I can still hear the voice of this woman asking me, “Did your mother let you go out this way?” More than once I felt humiliated because of the stares and the comments on my clothes, but it was one thing I would never change. However stressed out I would get in the morning, I have never stopped wearing what I wanted to wear. For at least 18 years, I was stuck in the middle of close-minded people watching my every move.

We can go back to the root of the problem, which is why was I living in this *hellhole* in the first place? The answer is simple: my parents. When I was barely one year old, they dragged me and my sister

in Burgundy to open their own restaurant. But before that, before me, they used to live in the most beautiful city I know – you can trust me on this one I have travelled a lot and no I am certainly not bias–. Both of my parents come from the south of France, and they met in Montpellier at a concert hall, the Grand Odeon, their own “meet cute.” The concert hall is located just between the ‘place de la comedie’ and the train station, which is the center of the city. The Ramones, The Cure, I heard so many stories of the groups my mother went to see at the Grand Odeon, nowadays called the Rockstore. Not far from the place, my sister also met her own fiancé. The story is oddly similar to *Friends*: She was living with her childhood best friend in this amazing and weirdly cheap apartment – the reason it was so cheap was the abandoned house just two feet away from her windows full of illegal refugees. One day two guys moved in the apartment next door, and four years later they were engaged. The city is full of memories for my family, not only my parents and sister, but my aunts, uncles, cousins. For a long time, I felt out of place while listening to them talking about this bond they all shared, talking about their home that was different from mine. The place became an obsession. I had to go there and make some memories of my own.

I only lived there for a year, but it was one hell of a year. I tried hard to find a connection to my family, following my sister around, going back to the Rockstor, the place my parents met. I was yearning for this feeling of belonging. In some way nothing was new for me. Throughout my family’s anecdotes I was already acquainted with the city we called “La surdouée”. I had been away for some time, but I was finally at home too. The city is full of culture and beauty everywhere. Day after day, I surprised myself. I was more reckless than I ever dared to be. On the first day of university, I went out of my comfort zone and talk to a girl who was looking for directions. Oddly enough, Anaëlle, the lost girl, was a perfect match for me. Wearing jean jacket, doc martens, and funky glasses, she was two years older than me and full of knowledge about arts, music, and pop culture. I was in awe of her. We were made to be friends. Her apartment was one of my favorite places to spend time at. It was all white except for her many drawings and some Bowie’ posters. She also had many plants and an old cat named Albus Dumbledore. When I was not meeting unique people, I was wandering alone in the city, observing, absorbing. I was proud to talk about my favorite spots with my father, but mostly I enjoyed finally founding a passion we could share. From *Port-Marianne* to *Croix-d’argent* (2 of the 7 neighborhoods of Montpellier), the narrow street full of thrift shops and bakeries to the fountains with their white sculptures of nude women. In the middle of all that, here I was falling in love with every pieces of this city, feeling at ease and complete. And as a

consequence of being comfortable with my environment, I got comfortable with myself. I was no longer the pale girl, the tall girl, the weird girl. I was just me, and I loved it.

Living in a big city, after being trapped for so long in a town of 5,000 habitants, felt like getting rid of a huge weight on my shoulder that I didn't even realized was getting me down. It is really not that nice to live where everybody knows your name. In Montpellier you can be free to be whoever you want. You can walk around in a tutu without eyes following you. Whatever I was searching for when I first decided to go, I got way more than expected. I wanted to get closer to my sister, to create a bond with my father, but in some way, I just got closer to myself.

The Farm That Changed My Life

Jillian Rumpf

“Having my grandparents farm was a huge part in finding my inner child, and learning lessons like to be fearless, and to never give up, and to be responsible, and committed in life. If I didn’t have the creek, the animals, or the reckless activities who knows how I would of turned out.”

During the school year my life was the definition of chaotic, but in the summer when I did not have school taking eight hours out of my day, I replaced that time at my grandparents farm. I would go from school, to sports, to eating and sleeping, to riding the four wheeler, going to the creek, and feeding all the animals. The transition from having zero time to simply be a normal kid, to having so much free time was just unreal sometimes. In small town Dekalb, Missouri at my grandparents farm I found a whole new me and learned many life lessons through getting dirty at the creek, playing with all the animals, and the reckless activities.

When I was in elementary I was always on the go. Whether it was softball practice, basketball practice, school, or out of town tournaments, it was never a boring day for me. I was constantly gone and never got to spend time with my friends and family like most kids did. A typical day for me was to wake up, go to school, come home, leave straight for practice with a quick stop at the local gas station for a snack. Then we would head to Kansas City, an hour and 10 minutes away, and arrive home about 9:00 p.m. Giving me just enough time to shower, eat some dinner, and be in bed by 10:00. Many people would ask, when did I have time for homework? Homework was never a priority for me, but when I started to fall behind on my assignments the only homework place for me was in the car, on my way to a practice. My grandma's farm always encouraged me to get my work done early thought, because if I did not I was not aloud to go to my grandparents until my homework was done.

As a kid I was extremely spoiled, and never knew what being grateful was. One would say that I had no friends or life outside of sports because I never knew anyone to talk to and I never enjoyed talking either. Going to my grandparents creek brought out a whole new side of me. My brother, cousin, and I would always go down to the creek with our worn down muddy rain boots on and oversized overalls. Everytime we went down to the creek we would make a fire big enough that we could see the black smoke above the trees when we would get lost adventuring to as far down the creek as we could. We always walked down to the old rusted water pipe that was about a mile and a half down the creek. The water was so deep there that we could jump from the the top of the

water pipe into the creek. We always acted as if we were hobos when we were at the creek and tried to build huts and find food. The creek was important to me because it taught me to be grateful for all the resources we have in today's world. The creek brought out the inner child in me because I could run and jump in the creek, get dirty, and act as if nobody was around without worrying about if I had friends or not because all I needed was the farm and my family to enjoy my life.

Going to my grandparents taught me so many important lessons as a kid. When I stayed the night at my grandparents each morning I had to wake up at 6 a.m. to feed and water all the animals. I hated getting up early, but every morning I got to wake up and see the sunrise and it made getting up early so much better. On my grandparents farm they had horses, cows, pigs, chickens, dogs, and cats. I was a big fan of the cats. When I was younger my grandma had 10 cats, not including the batch of 10 kittens she had almost every month. I would say most of the kittens hated me because I used to catch them by their tails when they would run away and lock them in the bathroom with me so I could tame them. Taking care of the cows was my least favorite thing to do. Everytime I would go to feed them and their nasty slimy slobber would get all over me, but the good news was that meant it was time to go to the creek and wash off. Each morning I had to make sure all the animals were healthy, fed, and watered, and if I did not they could of overheated, or got dehydrated and it would of been my fault. Waking up and taking care of the animals at my grandparents farm taught me responsibility, and commitment.

Grandma and grandpa's house was always the place to be reckless. In the winter, my brother and I would tie the sled up to the four wheeler and drag each other all around the property. We were fearless. We built tree houses, and would sled from the top of the terrace all the way down to the bottom, we would ride the bull, and occasionally we would ride the pigs. Riding the bull was much more terrifying than the pig because you never knew if the bull was going to come running back, but the pig if we fell off we always chased it down and got right back on. We kept riding the pigs until finally they got used to us. The life lessons I learned from riding animals was to get back up and keeping trying and to never give up.

You know how kids always tend to have a freak accident sometime in their life? Yeah, I got to be apart of my brothers. One day my brother and I were driving around like maniacs on our fourwheelers when my brother decided that the 20 foot rock pile looked like his next mission. My brother started about 50 feet away from it as I sat back on top of the hill about 100 feet away. As he revved the engine all that was going through my mind was, " this is not going to end well." He floored the gas as he got closer and closer the more I squinted my eyes and as he

started to get some air the next thing I know the fourwheeler is going one way and my brother is going the other. As he hit the ground I took off sprinting towards the house yelling, "Grandma!!" We both came shooting out of the house when the next thing we know my brother is back on his four wheeler riding back up to us with dust all over him. How he didn't break everything in his body and walk away with nothing wrong with him, we have no idea. But after that day, I learned to be smart and think about what I am doing before I do it.

Being an athlete and having parents who constantly wanted you to go shoot at the gym and workout, often felt like I had no time to be with my friends or my family or enjoy anything but sports. Having my grandparents farm was a huge part in finding my inner child, and learning lessons like to be fearless, and to never give up, and to be responsible, and committed in life. If I didn't have the creek, the animals, or the reckless activities who knows how I would of turned out. No child should ever feel that there life revolves around sports, they should get a summer and have that time to find a whole new side of them, so they can enjoy the laughs, the scares, and the memories outside of sports.

10' by 12'

Ella Sonderegger

“My monsters were no longer secrets and I was no longer afraid of the dark, purple-blue fluorescent truths. Like any other young adult, I had to face the truth behind my fears and manipulate them in order to thrive.”

Like any other young child I was so ignorant to the differences of right and wrong. However, I could sense evil. Evil can come in different shapes and sizes. For some it was a cracked closet door, the slightly open curtains peeping out into the dark night, or the fear of a monster under the bed. Mine was the room in the basement and the thirteen year old boy that slept in it. This night not only haunts the doorway of my soul, but is the key to almost all of my emotions and human connections I make. This is when I started to realize that nightmare wasn't a figment of my fucked up imagination. That night and the monsters it created in my brain, were real and would pound on my soul's doorway. They were there banging me in the chest, taking one breathe away at a time. I would then find myself in the least surprising places: bringing me back to that basement to learn a lot about the human mind and the process of grief.

I lay there on my back, eight years old pants down, on his queen sized cornered mattress. The blanket was shoved against the wall leaving no space for privacy. I was in a 10' by 12' room with the walls still closing in to this day. The purple-blue fluorescent light from the lava lamp is always lit in the back of my mind and my body still curls together into its own turtle shell way, just like it did the time he went down on me. The night or day this occurred on, I can't remember because the room had no windows, would haunt the doorway to my soul for the rest of my life. Older, he now smells of dirty diesel mechanic and sweet tobacco chew. Thinking of those smells, just typing them, makes my skin crawl and my nose shrivel up like I'm sniffing rotten milk. Which, by the way, I would much rather smell. Smelling them used to upset me so much I could feel my insides boiling with anxiety and it made me feel like I was drowning. Suffocating.

Sometimes my anxiety would be triggered from things like being at work and all the customers around me with their smug faces waving their beer mugs in the air at me, demanding refills.

My tunnel vision would cave in and everything silenced. What came to mind? Eight year old me is floating endlessly; she's stuck in space, an abyss, half naked in a dark purple-blue fluorescent room watching him pull her pants away and close the door. The sound of the door echos and at a young age I learned how to fake orgasm. Everything is foggy. My brain is clogged. I don't understand English, in fact I don't understand anything happening around me. I'm brought back to reality and I storm away crying out of the back kitchen door to get away from the customers.

When little kids don't know how to rationalize something they come up with their own ways to reason and make excuses for things. They somehow have the ability to decide whats going to be real and whats going to be pretend. Children can do this because they are so naive, need to survive and protect themselves.

The 2016 new year just broke and I stopped coming up with ways to pretend. It was January, but felt like March. The first weekend of having my car I would stay out till 6 a.m. with my friends running around from point 'a' to point 'b'. I went to parties in half furnished trap houses to witness fights that ended with someone getting their head stomped in and hung out in car wash parking lots smoking weed. Winter turned into spring and as the snow would melt, the flowers would bloom. Spring would then get more leg spreading hot, turning into summer. I started to see things more and more clearly. I finally stopped being so naive to the thoughts I had dug holes for and buried in the back of my mind. I wanted to escape those zombies, so I turned myself into one. It was kind of like dipping my toes in to see if the water was too cold. Eventually, I decided it was just right and I dove straight in.

One night in specific, I quite literally dove straight in. I would find myself at my moms house, in country side Savannah, Missouri, knees bent with my head cowering into the infamous garage fridge looking for loose end beers and single shot bottles. Arms filled with a random collection of alcohol, my best friend at the time and I calmly walked our way to the four foot deep above ground pool all the way at the end of my back yard. The pool was perfect at night. Nothing blocked the night sky and it was far enough away from the house that nobody could hear you laughing or yelling drunk slurs. It was definitely far enough out that we confidently started skinny dipping and drinking without worrying we'd get caught. Three a.m. and nobody knows how many drinks down, I look at my best friend and told her something I had never even said out loud to myself. I told her about eight year old me trapped in that 10' by 12' room with the walls closing in and the purple-blue fluorescent light getting darker and darker until the door

echos shut. I was so drunk that when I told her, my emotions would bounce from crying about what I had gone through to laughing hysterically because it made me so uncomfortable that I didn't know what to think or do. My friend would put her hand over my mouth and tell me to shush in fear someone would hear me. As what I said slapped her sober, my laugh gave out and became bawling. She cradled my nude body in the four feet deep lukewarm pool water. I couldn't even tell the difference between the chlorine pool water to the tears running down my face.

The next morning I woke up in my king sized cornered mattress, in my room not much bigger than the 10' by 12' room, scared to turn over and face the first person I ever told my only secret to. I was terrified of what judgements were ahead of me. We both woke up, she gave me a look and her eyes asked if I remembered what happened the night before. My eyes responded with more tears and she cradled me some more, except I was in my pajamas this time and surrounded by my fully fluffed comforter. As we lay there in some what awkward silence, my walls started to cave in like the room in the basement. When the silence was finally broken, I had a reassuring friend there to listen to me tell my story sober. Sober and overwhelmed with emotions, I started playing the heart hollowing sad song "Sea of Love" by Cat Power. To the situation, it was a pretty irrelevant song, but allowed my body and mind to feel all my overwhelming emotions in a healthy way followed by a lot more crying. My friend would eventually tell me I had to stop playing the song and get myself up and ready for the day. So, that is what I would do for the next three months. I would drag myself out of bed and get ready for the pain staking days that awaited me.

As the months passed by, my secret would stay a secret and I would make no more progress in grief. At the time looking back on the last few months, I was feeling pretty good about myself. Not only was I finally able to fully understand what had happened to me years before in that 10' by 12' room, but I said it out loud. It didn't roll off the tongue smoothly, as the word molestation never does, but I still said it out loud. After telling the first person I ever told, I started to say it out loud to myself, alone in the car. It was one of the only things I could ever think about and the more and more I thought about it, I went from overwhelmed and confused to filled with fury. I hated the person who did it to me. I remember when I was younger, before I started to make excuses and pretend, I was so mad about it that any time I was near this person: in cars, at the dinner table in a restaurant, anywhere; I would start punching them ruthlessly and in the face too. Eight year old me could sense evil and he was always around.

I was pissed that it happened to me. The more and more I thought about it my cringing body would turn into rock solid skin. I was tired of hearing his name. I was tired of seeing and feeling that room. I wanted to shove scissors through my ears, so it was one less thing I had to hear about him; his name. Although he was rarely ever around, his shadow stood taller and darker than mine making it hard to forget.

It was now fall of 2016, and my dad just sold the house and the 10' by 12' room in the basement was physically out of my life forever. My dad, step mom, and step brother and I would move into a furnished, studio styled barn to temporarily live in while our house was being built. The barn had two sides to it. One side had the half kitchen, full bathroom, black wood burning stove, and my parents bed. The other side would have our television/living room set up, the fridge, and two dividing walls that went all the way, but a foot from the ceiling giving my step brother and I cubical like bed rooms. There wasn't a lot of privacy in the year of living in the barn, but I was fine with that. I didn't need a lot of privacy, nor did I crave it. In fact, I wanted to feel as close as possible with my family.

Throughout the year, things almost felt too close. We were all getting aggravated with the lack of space and the lay out of the barn. At the time, I was angry with my dad and step mom for making us move into a barn, so they could build their dream home. I didn't know why they couldn't wait until my step brother and I had moved out. Everything they did started to irk me. I thought they were full of themselves, obsessed with their cooker cutter life, creating a perfect home, mowing the lawn, planting a fulfilled garden, and ending the day by drinking beers on the front porch. I was disgusted with how relaxed and content they were with their country life. I thought they were simple minded people. So, I did what any other teenager would do. I expressed my feelings about it to someone without thinking twice. I texted my cousin on a fuse lit rage about our family and how much they suck. Being a few more years older than me and a little more mature, her loyalty stuck with our family and she sent screenshots of the messages to my dad. That snake. Looking back at this whole situation I laugh and I see it exactly how it was. I was being immature and bratty. Lucky me, I have a dad that could see I didn't mean any of the words I sent her and that I was exactly what I was. A relentless teenager filled with emotions that don't mean shit. He told my cousin not to take me so serious and he confronted me about the messages. He confronted me as I sat there on one side of the barn laying in the sun, on their bed, grazing my hand across soft animal fur blanket, by asking me why I was so upset about the cooker cutter life I had been

given and why I bothered feeding into those emotions. My dad talked me down and reminded me how I actually love almost everyone in my family. He looked at me, eyebrows raised, soft eyes holding my hand and said name by name followed by, “you love them right?” Even though he already knew the answer, I would respond with my head low saying, “well yeah...” Until he said it. He said that name followed by, “you love them right?”. That name that made me want to shove scissors in my ears rather than hear another peep about him. I looked up at my father in disgust and I stop petting the blanket. I was pissed again. I had shifted from feeling sorry to bitter and I responded with, “no” as if that was the dumbest question he could have ever asked. I could tell I caught him off guard. He doubts me and repeats himself. He says that fucking name again. I shifted from bitter to enraged and reassured my dad that I, in fact, did not love him. This made my dad uncomfortable and all of a sudden I shifted from enrage to scared. I was too heated in the moment to see the situation I had dragged myself into. I would have rather become deaf mute than tell him what I had climbed up the ladder to say. I was embarrassed to share the words that would come out of my mouth next, but I had no choice to tell him about the 10’ by 12’ room and what had happened in it.

After I told my dad in very sparse detail, he goes outside to accompany my step mom, who was smoking an evening cigarette, to repeat to her what I had just broken down to him. They call my mother, who was currently at a baseball game with my at the time step father. She wasted no time to come over. I stayed seated on the side of the barn that contained the half kitchen, full bath, and my parents bed. I peered out the windows as they all sat in distress conferencing around the patio table. Behind them was the wide open field of grass. The trees were losing their leafs and the wind softly blew every 5 minutes. My dad, step mom, and mom all conversed for what felt like a long time. I couldn’t hear what they had to say and for some reason I wasn’t eager to find out. I wanted to hide my face. I was disgusted with myself.

I found myself outside with my parents and my brain went foggy. They were coming up with solutions to help. Plan a, plan b, plan c, so on and so forth. They wanted to help me, but little did they know I didn’t want the help they were trying to give me. They wanted me to go to therapy with *him*. They wanted me to sit in a room and confront *him* with a professional there. I couldn’t believe my ears. Now I really wanted to shove scissors in them because I was so dumb founded by what they were suggesting. I took a step back and realized that they were just trying to be the best parents they could be. How does any one parent know exactly what is the right and wrong way to handle this situation? They don’t because they

weren't in my shoes. They didn't know what I was going through. What it was like for me to go through this in my mind and process it the way I did.

After a long awkward and saddening talk with my parents about *things*, I found myself in my therapist's office. An even smaller room. 7' by 9' I sat there in a cushioned arm chair and on my left next to a therapeutic orange salt lamp. She had shelves that were filled with boxes, that were filled with files. She had sticky notes everywhere. On her computer screen, on the desk that separated us, on the shelves that held boxes, and on the boxes that held files. In the back corner there was a box of toys, obviously for the younger kids she had sessions with. I sat there scatter-brained. My parents had called her ahead of time and gave her a little run-down of what I was going through. By the time I had gotten there, I was so exhausted in my head that I didn't even have the gumption to say it out loud one more time. I wrote it down on a piece of her yellow legal pad notebook paper in fine black pen. I don't remember much of what we talked about afterwards, but I know that memory just became another file in those boxes, on a shelf in her 7' by 9' office.

Grief can come in many different shapes and sizes. For some it's a passing relative, divorce, or even imprisonment. Grief—keen mental suffering or distress over affliction or loss. Grief informal definition—trouble or annoyance. The process of grief is said to be five general steps; this was the order of mine. One, denial: at such a young age I convinced my little brain that it was just a dream, a figment of my fucked-up imagination. Two, anger: if I'm being honest with myself I skipped anger and went straight into depression, so I'll come back to this later. Three, depression: I found myself drinking considerably large amounts of alcohol and abusing my prescription drugs. I wanted to find ways to escape my body and not feel like I was living in my mind, so I got drunk or high. The ironic part was every time I was intoxicated, I had to face the worst thing that ever happened to me. The alcohol and highs just centered in and concentrated on my most present emotion and truth is they made me feel my feelings about the situation even more in an unhealthy way. Four, bargaining: for most this is something like, "Please God just fix this" or someone thinking to themselves, "What if..." situations. This phase didn't exist for me, I had nothing to bargain and I don't believe in God. I had nobody to pray my soul away to. Maybe this is why I got so angry, or maybe it wasn't. Five, anger: I not only started to hate this person, but I started hating my family and the parts he came from. I wanted them all to turn ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Five, acceptance: after saying it out loud to my parents, the ones I felt most embarrassed to tell, I

grieved a little more. It didn't make everything poof away, but I had lifted what felt like cylinder block off of my chest. My monsters were no longer secrets and I was no longer afraid of the dark, purple-blue fluorescent truths. Like any other young adult, I had to face the truth behind my fears and manipulate them in order to thrive.

Sweet Serenity

Araimani Wade

“Yes, they are complete strangers, but they know exactly what mind state you are in. I could remember the words one of the women told me, ‘The world has enough room to make tons of mistakes, but there’s also room for hope and that warms my heart just to know I could walk through a long dark tunnel, but there awaits a tiny light at the end.’”

Do you have that one place you can go to clear your mind? Somewhere you go to talk your problems out or just to get away from everything? As I sit here, I think of a cool breeze that comes across me while the birds sing with the wind. The St. Louis Arch, Riverfront is my tranquil spot, even on my gloomy day. A secret place where you feel you can go to clear your head, to go talk to a trusted person, or just a place which brings you good security. This place is serene; making it my happy place.

On my bad days, I can run to this place without hesitation. Who would have thought that just one single place could calm a storm with just a hush of a warm breeze? I could remember a time where a loss of a loved one, oh how it shattered my heart into pieces. I never knew one person could leave an individual with such great grief. When they pronounced my great-grandmother’s death, I did not take it well. It was the kind of grief that cut so razor sharp deep, that could make someone feel so alone in a dark room and warm heater hovering close by. I literally sat in my great-grandmother’s bedroom every day, and as soon as you walk in my great grandmother’s bedroom you could smell the putrid odor from old clothes, leakage of bodily fluid in the sheets that later sank into the mattress. I could remember having the urge to get away and take a breather and I began to run with the high winds and droopy filled eyes with tears with the size of gumdrops. I came across a place that instantly took all the internal pain away. It’s the very first breath when your head’s been drowning underwater, and it’s the lightness in the air which was my sigh of relief which brought happiness that I haven’t felt in so long.

A trip to get away where there is just a massive, rusty, tarnished ship. A navy blue ship formerly known as the marina, which transports passengers through the slimy, grimy river. When my family would argue at family gatherings and wouldn’t talk for years or until a death in the family would occur, it used to crush my heart. The saying “Family is all you’ve got, so cherish your loved ones’ but all they did was argue,

and that tore me apart. The hate I used to have, I was being forced to go over to my grandmother's home as a child because my parents told me to. I would have lost all love or sometimes I would feel I was being neglected from my grandmother's love, because I knew when I would go over to her home, my relatives would start arguing over something so little. I know now as an adult, that most of the arguing would start once the alcoholic beverages were dispersed. One family reunion we had in Forest Park; a nearby park by the St. Louis Arch, Riverfront, and my family started arguing and I couldn't take it any longer so I walked down to the Riverfront and came across a musical ship. The musical entrance welcomes the boarding passengers for a soothing trip. All I could remember was the ticket master asking Is there any more passengers that want to aboard the ship, and I walked up to find a seat. The sound of sweet jazz trembles to your ears, played by the aged instrumentalist on the top deck. I used to come here all the time to listen to Gerald, the instrumentalist who could play "Love and Happiness by Al Green." I get lost in the notes that he would play and all my problems, cares would go away. People come from all over to see the historic artifacts and the ancient, but rigid carved messages from long ago onto the dull bricks aligned by the road. This place is more conservative, due to the well-kept aged artifacts and daily tours that many may say is unbelievable.

Also, the St. Louis Arch, Riverfront is a safe place, it's secured by mobile police officers all day and all night. If you're trying to get away from a bad job or abusive relationship you could look around for a bright and vibrant yellow, jersey-like blouse worn by multiple women who are there to help comfort you if you're in your time of need. Yes, they are complete strangers, but they know exactly what mind state you are in. I could remember the words one of the women told me, "The world has enough room to make tons of mistakes, but there's also room for hope and that warms my heart just to know I could walk through a long dark tunnel, but there awaits a tiny light at the end." Those very words help me today when I feel myself giving up or feel as if there's no hope out there for me. These wonderful ladies make you feel safe at this place and are willing to walk and talk with you for however long the matter may take. They're kind of the reason I believe in life, simply because they remind you "what's the day without a little night," by shedding a little light back into your life, which is the reason why they wear the bright and vibrant yellow jersey-like shirts.

In conclusion, a secret place where you feel you can go to clear your head, to go talk to a trusted person, or just a place which brings you good security. The St. Louis Arch, Riverfront is my tranquil spot,

even on my gloomy day. This great serenity comes from your special place which should be considered your happy place. No matter the place or time you can go there to bring you peace. “A place is place no matter how small” – Dr. Seuss.

A close-up photograph of a yellow upholstered chair. The chair's fabric has a visible vertical ribbed texture. The word "Interview" is centered over the chair in a black, serif font. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Interview

Do Better

Tia Booker

“She knew she didn't want her neighborhood lifestyle, so she chose to do better for herself.”

Can you imagine moving out of the house at the age of thirteen? Well, my mother did. My mother grew up in a negative environment, where she saw her parents passed out on the couch, her mom beaten on a daily basis, and people telling her she could not be successful.

Monica Patton was born to Nancy and Arthur Gibson on January 24, 1975 at The Home of G Phillips Hospital; a hospital for blacks. She is ninth child out of ten. I interviewed my mom because I wanted to learn more about her difficult childhood and how she overcame to become the successful woman she is today. Living in a negative environment doesn't mean you have to live a negative lifestyle; you can be your own person do better for yourself.

My mom's childhood was a difficult struggle and filled with sadness. She grew up poor and with alcoholic parents. The church gave them free food, which came from the government. The products of the food had the name government on it. They were given cheese, milk, powder eggs, com flakes, and other food products. As she told me this, her voice expression was of sadness and anger, "I was sad that no one in the world cared for me. Why did it happen to me? I didn't understand why I had to go through what I went through." She went through what most black kids in the 80s went through; they saw drugs everywhere, their mother beaten by their husband or boyfriend, their parents were alcoholics or drug addicts, and at most were on government assistance.

My mom childhood was a struggle, but she found a way to overcome it. She knew she didn't want her neighborhood lifestyle, so she chose to do better for herself. Every black kid felt as if no one cared for them and she grew tired of it; tired of having to eat the same food and "you need an education because no one is going to take care of you". My mom wouldn't be the successful woman she is today without the help of my Aunt Rhonda.

My mom did what she had to do on her own to be successful and escape. She escaped the lifestyle that people told her she should be living. She escaped the streets, teen pregnancy, being beat by her man, and not finishing out high school. Before my mom escaped, she saw her mom get beat on a daily basis by

her boyfriends. As a child she would have nightmares of her mom lying in her own pool of blood due to her boyfriends beating her. Still, to this day, she has flashbacks whenever she sees a man put his hands on a woman. She told me, "I just knew I didn't want that life." She knew there was more in life than what she was shown, she wanted to do better for herself, and prove to people that they were wrong about her. She didn't want to wait on a once a month check from the government, a social worker coming to her house, didn't want to starve, sleep on the floor or share a bed with someone else. My mom couldn't take seeing her mom in pain, so she moved in with her sister Rhonda at the age of thirteen. In order for her to strive in life she did after school activities, promised herself to stay away from boys, and did hair to make money or get food. This made her want to do better for herself and to be her own person. Sometimes in life we have to do what needs to be done in order to strive in life.

My mom childhood influenced her to be a great parent to my sisters and me. She made sure we didn't have a difficult childhood. Growing up my mom gave us the opportunity of a great education by sending us to a private school and to get involve with sports. Education was very important to my mom. She signed us up for educational programs, so we could have the chance of being successful. As a child my mom provided a different meal every day, and there was no drinking allowed in the house, and told us every day she loved us. My mom made sure she was present in our lives. She has shown me how to be successful woman by having and education and choosing to be my own person.

My mom didn't have the best childhood, but she found a way to overcome her struggles, escape her negative environment, and did better for herself. Looking back at her childhood she realized it made stronger and taught her how to make nothing into something. Her mom would only have ten dollars and manage to make a meal every day. In any situation you face in your life you can overcome it. My mom's advice to those who are going through a trouble childhood or life is, "Don't look at your life as being bad, it will get better. Work for what you want. When you're in that type of situation it is easy to stupid things. Always keep God first, have him in your heart, he will show you the road all you have to do is follow." Although you may be going through a struggle, you don't have to choose that type of situation; you can do better for yourself.

The New Normal

Kassidy Courter

“I chose to interview Renee to learn more about her that she didn’t share on a regular basis. I learned more about her husband, how she became a single parent after losing her husband, and how she continued life after it had been flipped around in such a short time.”

“Everything's going to be okay. I love you.” These were the last words Renee Cook said to her husband Charlie Cook. Charlie was a deputy for the Buchanan County Sheriff's Department, in the line of duty, when his life was cut short. Renee, at 28, with a two-year-old son was forced to learn how to live every day normally while her entire life had just been flipped upside down, and the love of her life had been ripped away. Through Renee’s journey, she has faced many struggles and even more obstacles, but she has never given up and always held her head high. While interviewing Renee I learned what happened to her husband, and how she dealt with herself and her son while facing an everyday struggle.

Many people would say that love, at first sight, is not real, but for Renee and Charlie Cook that is exactly what happened. When Renee and Charlie were seniors in high school they worked in the same building right next door to each other. At only 17 they knew they were meant for each other. The love started in 1996 where they would soon become high school sweethearts. At just 22, Charlie asked Renee to be his wife, and they got married right away. Just three years later they brought their first and only child into the world, Trevor Cook. Trevor was a daddy’s boy and after his father passed away, he would see his belongings in the house and his truck in the driveway and he wanted to know when dad was coming home. At only two years old he did not understand much, but to try and tell him that his dad was never coming home was one of Renee’s major struggles. Renee struggled to deal with Trevor as she described raising him, “fatherless.” She also says, “Now at 14, I don’t know what I’m doing, as far as raising a teenager on my own.” Renee’s biggest hope is to make Charlie proud of his son and proud of her while raising Trevor. As far as dealing with Trevor asking questions about his father, she just answers them. Renee tells Trevor everything he wants to know about his father and while they have conversations about him he wants to know more each time.

One might think that law enforcement officers are invincible and that nothing will ever happen to them. Charlie decided he wanted to be a police officer before he turned 21. Shortly after he went through the academy at Missouri Western State University (MWSU). Since Charlie was under the age of 21 when he finished the academy he was not allowed to be commissioned or the right to carry. So, when Charlie turned 21 he took a post-test and passed. He then became a Deputy for the Buchanan County Sheriff's Department (BCSD). Going into his 7th year in the line of duty, Charlie got a call very early in the morning. There was a call that there was an erratic motorcycle on the Belt Highway. Charlie proceeded to go look for the suspect when he soon found himself in a chase. Charlie was coming up over a hill when a semi truck was turning and blocking his lane. He swerved to miss the semi and hit a traffic control box. Renee was soon woken up "in complete disbelief," by Charlie's partner.

I can not imagine the heartbreak and shock that Renee was feeling after being woken up not knowing what her husband was going to be like. When Renee arrived at the hospital with her two-year-old son, "Everyone was just staring at us and didn't know what to say or do." Nobody talked to them and ignored their presence because they did not want to upset her any further. When Renee was allowed back to see her husband he was still conscious. Fortunately, she was able to say her last words to him, with teary eyes, "Everything's going to be okay. I love you." Charlie was life-flighted to The University of Kansas Hospital (KU Med) where he was having opened heart surgery to replace his aorta that had been torn, and he never was conscious again. On June 28, 2007, Charlie took his last breath. He suffered from major head trauma and numerous broken bones. Renee was lost after losing her husband, as most people would have. She has come a long way in these 11 years, but she still faces pain every day.

Losing a loved one is always hard, but losing the person you thought you were going to spend the rest of your life with is cruel. Eleven years later and she believes the heartbreak may never get better. For the first year she never left the house, and rarely ever found herself out of bed. Renee says her biggest struggle was, "trying to find my new normal" because Charlie's friends were also her friends and half of them no longer talked to her anymore. Also, she found trying to find her normal hard because one of Charlie's favorite holidays was 4th of July and they buried him on July 3rd, so Renee dreads 4th of July now because she knows she can't spend it with her husband.

Days were long, weeks were longer, and months seemed like years without Charlie, but Renee had to find a way to get through this awful time for herself and her son. Avoiding eye contact, Renee says she

told herself over and over, “It’s okay to be weak, to cry, and not be strong every day.” She had to teach herself how to be okay again and with tears flowing her eyes, she says, “Every day is growing. Every day is healing.” For Trevor, he still wonders today what his dad was like and what things he liked to do. Anytime he sees a car accident he wants to know if anyone has passed away and if everything is going to be okay. The only memory Trevor has of his father are pictures. To me, Renee is one of the strongest people in the world. Her strong, loving, and fearful heart is what gets her through every day and on her worst days, Renee still walks with a bright, beautiful smile, even if tears are just rushing down her face.

As you can see, Renee still hurts to this day, but she has truly come a long way especially with finding the new normal to her life. At the age of 28, Renee was now a widow. She is 40 and still has never remarried because she is sure Charlie was the one for her. I chose to interview Renee to learn more about her that she didn’t share on a regular basis. I learned more about her husband, how she became a single parent after losing her husband, and how she continued life after it had been flipped around in such a short time. Renee’s advice to anyone going through a similar situation is to, “lean on somebody that knows what you’re going through.” Renee found other people with similar stories and they helped her get through her depression and anxiety. While I sat and listened to Renee struggle to get most things out even 11 years later, I was destroyed inside. With a broken heart, tears falling down her face, Renee last added, “The day Charlie passed away, there was a beautiful pink sky, and now every time I see a pink sky I feel like it is him telling me that everything is going to be okay.” Renee’s positivity has gotten her so far and I just adore that she finds the good in such a tragedy. Now, every time I see a pink sky, I get goosebumps, tears in my eyes, and a heavy heart because I know how much seeing something so little makes a huge impact on her day.

The Great Litvinski

Bailey Gilbert

“His dream was always to become a coach, so he can help impact students lives the way his coaches impacted his.”

“Growing up, if you believe in something, if you want something then you need to get after it.”

That quote was advice given from my track and field coach at Missouri Western, Yuriy Litvinski, on how to succeed throughout life. He grew up in Bulgaria with his mom and sister. After his dad left them when he was seven, he tried to find a way to clear his head and get away from the depression he had towards his family. That is when he found triple jump. He started jumping around 11 years old, not realizing it would lead him to big things. After interviewing Yuriy Litvinski, I learned that even through Yuriy’s process of making a living in Bulgaria, making tough decisions, and getting a U.S Citizenship, he didn’t give up and never took anything for granted, which can teach all of us more about turning hard work into success.

Living in Bulgaria were not the happiest moments in Yuiry Litvinski’s life. Coach Litvinski mentions, “Growing up wasn’t easy at all, if you can imagine we were not blessed with a whole lot at home.” Basically, Yuriy is saying that he grew up in a poor environment and household. He grew up in a two-bedroom apartment with his mom and sister. While him and his sister went to school, his mom would go to her job as a teacher. Being a single mom working on a teaching salary with two kids made life hard. When Coach Litvinski was living with his family, he didn’t get a lot of personal belongings, just food and some clothes. That’s all his mom could afford, but Yuriy would help her by getting small jobs like mowing someone’s lawn. While I was growing up, I got many toys, clothes, and other things that were for entertainment. Interviewing Coach Litvisnki about his childhood made me look back and realize that I took all these unnecessary items for granted. Yuriy had to work hard to help put food on the table for his family, while other kids had the privilege of going shopping whenever and having many personal belongings. We all need to remember that the things we take for granted, someone else is praying for.

Deciding what to do after high school was tough for coach Litvisnki. He had many options to choose from after high school such as, signing a contract to triple jump in the Olympics, going to school in Bulgaria to get a college degree, or going to the U.S to compete in triple jump as well as getting a college degree. He had all these options because he worked hard throughout the years in triple jump. He chose to

go to the U.S to compete and get a degree in college, still hoping he could make it to the next Olympic games as well. In Litvinski's view, "We didn't have a collegiate student athletics system the way the U.S has it. We had only three, maybe three schools that competed in athletics out of the whole country." In other words, Yuriy believes that he could have better opportunities through sports and academics in the U.S, and that this was the best choice for him. I had many options to compete in track at different colleges, but I didn't want to leave my family like Yuriy did. Although Yuriy has trouble reconciling leaving home every now and then, he still doesn't regret making his decision. He chose UNI as his choice to continue his academic and athletic career, even if it meant leaving his family behind. I wouldn't have the guts that he had, especially how far away from home he is. Even though he had to take a dictionary everywhere he went because he couldn't speak English, he eventually taught himself how to speak fluent English and get a degree by never giving up and working hard.

Getting a citizenship in the U.S is not an easy process, and coach Litvinski would know. He stated, "I began working on my citizenship back in 2008 and became a citizen this year. Back in February is when I became a citizen. It took about 10 years to complete." In other words, Yuriy believes that if you want something, no matter how long it takes, keep fighting to earn your goal. There were many lawyers and judges who were involved during this whole process, but he kept fighting and officially earned it. He had to teach himself how to read, write, and speak English to qualify for a citizenship, as well as passing a test and interview. He taught himself to read and speak English from a dictionary but taught himself how to write by getting tutored. I think that it is impressive that he taught himself most of the skills that were required to earn a citizenship in the U.S. That is the definition of hard work, and I wouldn't have the patience or hard work to wait 10 years for a citizenship as well as teaching myself those skills like Litvinski did growing up.

In conclusion, Yuriy has succeeded throughout life all because he never gave up nor took things for granted. Although he doesn't triple jump anymore, and his family is not in Bulgaria currently, he still has what he calls, "buddies" that he will continue to visit. He also has memories and experiences that have led him to where he is now in life, as the head track and field coach at Missouri Western bettering the jumpers and sprinters. His dream was always to become a coach, so he can help impact students lives the way his coaches impacted his. Through surviving a tough life in Bulgaria, struggling with his decisions to come to America, and going through the process of gaining U.S citizenship, Litvinski's daily quote "Let's

get after it” has become his tag line depicting his journey of hard work and experiences that lead him to his successful life here in America.

The Last Christmas

Titalia Long

“I thought to myself, “This must be what the power of motherhood sounds like.” It makes you fight through the rough times.”

Merry Christmas, I'm pregnant! Imagine being seventeen giving your mother the best and worst Christmas gift ever. What's next? Will she keep the baby? Abort it? Give it up for adoption? How will she ever move on after making the biggest decision of her life. Jasmin Lashay Welch-Miller, my older sister, was that seventeen year old poor, pregnant girl, living in a house of five people and now adding on the sixth member. It is a known fact that not many teenage moms go to college after their baby and not many teenage fathers marry the mother of their child. Jasmin is now twenty with two children, engaged to her children's father, and is on the Dean's list at Maryville University in St. Louis, Missouri. I plan to find out about the struggles of being a teenage mom and how Jasmin overcame those obstacles.

The first struggle Jasmin faced was having to come out and tell her friends and family she was pregnant. Telling her loved ones about the pregnancy showed Jasmin who would stand by her side or not no matter what. “I was really nervous; I was concerned about what people would think, being judged. I mainly thought about how my life would change.” Becoming pregnant at a young age changed her life completely. Jasmin had to mature faster than most teens in order to become a better mom. Some people she will grow old with, and some people she had to let go for the sake of her child. She lost her best friend during her transition as a mother. “I lost my best friend after I had Honesty. It was mainly because we grew apart. Our priorities were different and the stuff we did for fun became different. Being a mom really changes your perspective on everything. It kind of made us bump heads. We couldn't relate so that grew us apart and then we just ended the friendship. Some of my other friends I stayed friends with so it wasn't as bad.” All I could think about was wow, out of all of her friends the one person she was closest to she lost. That must have hurt, I could tell by the disappointed look on her face.

If Jasmin's mother accepted the pregnancy, the weights on her shoulders would be lifted if she didn't, Jasmin would feel alone and crushed. Too scared of losing her mother Jasmin called her up on Christmas day to give her the news. Both Jasmin and her mother lived in the same house, but she just

couldn't tell her mom face to face. She knew she would be disappointed so over the phone was the easiest way. Jasmin mother's first reaction was, "You need to get an abortion." Jasmin was like no... "When my mom brought up the abortion it made me angry because I'll be getting rid of an innocent life. It wasn't Honesty's choice to be here so I knew I couldn't abort her." Jasmin's mind was made up by the time she spoke with her mother. This did not stop her mother from telling her how disappointed she was at her and how her life would change forever. Jasmin stressed abortion was still not an option. "The second reaction after she figured I was not going to go through with that she was supportive. Whatever it was that I needed she helped me out and was a proud grandparent. It made me feel better and I had even more support, it made me feel like I wasn't by myself." Jasmin had all the support she needed and hoped for now that the most important person in her life was in her corner.

Jasmin's mother, April, was strict because she was also once a teenage mom. She got pregnant at the age of seventeen, finished high school, but did not further her education in order to fulfill her priority as a mother. At the age of twenty-three April was raising four children on her own. Dedicating her life to her children, she tried her best to direct her children on the right path. All of her children will finish high school, then college, begin great careers, and then have children in that order. Her children had to be better than her not an equivalent of her. It was heartbreaking for Jasmin to have to tell her mother that she had done what her mother tried so very hard to prevent. Jasmin held off as long as she could to tell her mother about her pregnancy. She was the last to know. "My mom was definitely the last person I told, I was kind of scared about how she would feel since I was still young and in school and she always said she wanted us to stay in school and graduate go to college then have kids. I was kind of like oh, I know she's gonna be upset." Despite how she thought her mother will feel Jasmin just knew she had to tell her. In the end it turned out for the best.

The next struggle Jasmin had to face was school and work. Around four months Jasmin's pregnancy started to show. She was still in school at this time. Jasmin's belly was round, plumped, and hard. This definitely made Jasmin stand out, soon people started asking questions. This became very aggravating for Jasmin. She stated, "I felt annoyed because people would judge me and I could tell they had things to say and they didn't know me or my story." Every now and then Jasmin would catch someone staring at her belly and whispering. She tried not to let this bother her considering it was strange to see a pregnant girl walking around in their own high school but sometimes she just didn't appreciate the attention. Over all, students

and teachers tried their best to make Jasmin still feel accepted. After all, she was a straight A student. Working also became a struggle the farther she got into her pregnancy.” It only affected my performance around my last two months of pregnancy only because like around that time my feet were really swollen, my stomach was big, so it was harder to bend and stand for long periods of time. I had doctor’s notes and my manager was really sympathetic and understood so she worked with me.” Jasmin was lucky to have a female for a manager, because she was able to relate.

Finally, after Honesty (Jasmin’s first child) was born Jasmin thought the struggles would get better but they got worse. She found herself feeling alone. This was the hardest part about being pregnant. Jasmin went through a phase called postpartum depression. She was in denial of this depression at first, but it was something she could not ignore. In Jasmin’s words she puts it like this, “After I came from the hospital with my baby I felt really alone even if it was a house full of people. I felt depressed and sad for no reason. I don’t know if it was because my life was changing forever or what but I was really in that sad dark place and was unable to be myself. It was the lowest I’ve ever felt and I want to let all moms know that it’s normal and if you’re feeling that way then get help or talk to someone it will help.” Who knew that the hardest thing about having a baby was the emotional feelings of the mother. I was shocked to hear this. I would’ve thought the hardest thing about having a baby would be after it is born; when you have to consistently get up in the middle of the night.

Through all these struggles Jasmin was able to push through with the help of her family and keeping her head on straight. Whenever Jasmin is at school and her fiance is at work, Jasmin’s mother, April, steps in to save the day. April watches her grandkids for hours out of the weekdays to save Jasmin’s money and an extra trip to preschool. She enjoys helping out her daughter and making a huge impact on the children’s lives. Jasmin knew her mom would make a great grandparent and what also helped Jasmin out was the father being involved, Charles. When Charles comes home from work the first thing he does is go straight to his kids and keeps them occupied when Jasmin is doing homework. She stated the following about Charles, “He helped and is a huge help mentally, emotionally and physically with both me and the kids. With my pregnancies he has always been around and someone I can count on. That made me feel so loved and cared about and I knew he was going to be a good father. He turned out to be a great one.” Charles, would let Jasmin know everyday she is not alone and that he loves her. Jasmin is the most beautiful person in the world to Charles, and him showing it uplifted Jasmin’s spirit. Not only did Jasmin have family to

support her but she also had the right state of mind. When Jasmin is feeling frustrated she takes a second to think about what's really important." I got my school work done and everything was the same. I didn't miss any days or make excuses. I just did what I had to do. I'm doing this for them so that motivation makes you believe in your mind it is hard but to you, you know Ima get through this so don't stress over it." I felt the power in her voice as she stated this. I thought to myself, "This must be what the power of motherhood sounds like." It makes you fight through the rough times.

Being a teenage mom is not easy. It has its struggles but Jasmin overcame them. At the end of my interview I learned not to make excuses. As long as I am able to stay motivated I can do anything. My sister, Jasmin, is a role model to both her kids and me. She stated, "The main reason I kept going was I know I had to be a role model. I knew I had to be a mother for my child to look up to and be able to guide her. I can't guide her in the right direction without being able to be that example for her. I want her to be able to know she can do whatever she wants to do regardless of the obstacles in her way and to keep motivating herself. Never tell yourself you can't do something so, I kept telling myself I have to do this." Motivation is the key to success and overcoming obstacles.

Learning Acceptance

Gabriella Rustici

“Those that judge others will never be able to understand, but those that understand will never judge others. Deon looked back and realized that ‘It's hard to have others accept you if you don't accept yourself first.’”

When there is something a person is unsure of within, they try to unscramble that feeling that comes so natural. A mysterious feeling that eventually will boil over when the time is right. Building up enough courage to finally lift the lid, and handle the simmering, nerve-racking pot of life. In today's society, people are becoming more and more accepting of others and less judgmental. The only way for us to grow as a community is by learning more about each other and putting our own views aside. After an interview with a close friend, he helped me understand the life of being part of the LGBTQ+ community. Not many can grasp the amount of hatred they can get for being themselves. Deon wanted to show me that the only way to get past all that was through acceptance. The only way to be truly happy with oneself is to be completely honest with one's social group, family, and self.

Wanting to be liked is a very common feeling everyone experiences, but in reality, it is so hard to achieve. Deon grew up in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois and attended public school all of his life. He knew at a very young age that something in his life felt different but never acted upon this feeling. Growing up, he had a naturally softer-pitched voice than most kids in school, which lead him to get picked on. He was taunted and put down because he was being himself which lead others to assume his sexuality. Deon felt ashamed and confused, with no one to talk to about these thoughts he was thinking. Society has a strenuous time understanding that we all suffer from our own insecurities. It is hard to find positivity when everything around us is shame and hate. Those that judge others will never be able to understand, but those that understand will never judge others. Deon looked back and realized that “It's hard to have others accept you if you don't accept yourself first.” Having a lack of confidence in ourselves can make it difficult for us to open up to others. It takes time before some are comfortable enough to open up to others. Deon knew he had to make a change in his life to be able to get to the point in his life he would be happy with. This was his first step in learning to be accepting with not only himself but with his social

groups. After the first part of the interview, I learned that being liked isn't the most important thing in life. What is important is whether I am happy with myself and the person I am becoming. The best thing I can do is be myself and if others don't like me then that is something I am going to have to live with.

The approval of our family can be very important in the decisions we make and the path we have for ourselves. Deon grew up with a family for eight and is very close to each one of them. After wanting to walk around in his mom's heels and attempting to date girls, he knew he needed to tell someone. A person he could talk to about what he was experiencing was his twin sister, Deondrea. She was the first person to know that he was attracted to men and was wonderfully understanding of his situation. She tried helping him with the next step which was telling the rest of their family. The only problem was Deon's family goes to a Christian church every Sunday and is important that their family attends. This made it even more difficult for him to open up to his family knowing that some Christians are not as open to the gay community. He knew that he could never tell his grandmother about his sexual orientation because for her it is a generational thing. "I believe she won't ever understand because she grew up around heterosexuals making it harder to fully process what it means to be gay." After a long time of hesitation of telling his parents, he decided it was his time. In the drive-thru of McDonald's, a day before Deon's 18th birthday, he finally tells her. His mom said to him, "Stop talking to me, you disgust me, I am so embarrassed." This hurt him to hear coming from his own mom, but this didn't stop him from being himself. He wished he had her support more, but one can't force someone to be ok with something. Deon has his siblings approval, and to him, that is all that really matters in the end. I learned that one can't live a life full of secrets from those that they love. Being honest with others whether they are ok with the truth or not it can only help oneself process their feelings. I always strive to get approval of my family, but my happiness will always have to come first.

Our greatest responsibility is to have self-love and know that we are enough. Deon is an activist in the LGBTQ+ community, as an active member and treasurer of pride alliance. He wants to make a difference in the lives of others and hopes to make a change. Deon lost some close relationships with his friends and family because of his sexual orientation. This isn't something he chose it is a natural feeling he can't change. He had to learn early on that being self-reliant was important in the world we live in. Being able to love oneself in a world full of hate can be challenging, but possible to overcome. Deon lived by a motto to keep his hope still alive, "If you spend your whole life acting and being someone else,

who is gonna be you?” To him this a reminder that the only person he needs to be is himself. If one is not true to themselves, then they will spend their life unhappy. Deon has struggled with hatred from others, but he knew he wasn’t alone. He reached out to others like him that were in the same state of confusion. “We are all flawed so why do we judge others for being ourselves.” His insecurities are always gonna be there, but he doesn’t let that define who he is as a person. Deon expresses love and happiness to others because that is essential to his process of accepting himself. I feel like whether we are part of the LGBTQ+ community or not we all have our own insecurities. We have to find the positivity and the good about ourselves instead of looking at all our flaws.

We all have flaws in this world, but with acceptance, we can find more love within ourselves. Deon hasn’t ever had it easy when it came to his lifestyle choices. Through the teasing of his voice and disapproval of his parents, he found himself during it all. He works so hard to be a good person to show himself things can get better. Ever since the day he came out he feels like he can truly be accepting of himself. It isn’t a secret anymore of who he is, it is the truth that he can finally live and be happy with. I learned a lot from this interview but the most important thing I learned was to be open-minded. We are all different in every single way and we should all learn to embrace our differences. Being truthful to oneself is the key to finding ourselves and happiness in the big world.

The Hard Honest Truth About Being Transgender

Ella Sonderegger

“Taylor firmly stated his opinion on support he gets from people now, ‘Now, I don’t give a shit. This is who I am you’re going to accept it or not, you’re gonna be here or you can not. It’s cool, its whatever.’”

How much do you think you’re aware of when you’re young? From colors to shapes to sexuality, what age do you start to become aware of your surroundings? Like the smells you prefer or how the wind hits your body and when it does it shapes around you. It takes shape of your body, from your small feet to your chest and your hair that blew along with it. Why are there things we can recollect from when we were younger and some things we can’t? How hard it was to learn how to tie your shoes or learn how to ride a bike without training wheels. What part of our brain decides what is significant and what isn’t? As a 20 year old transgender, female to male, Taylor Ray Peek can remember things as far back as his first crush being a girl at church when he was just four years old. Growing up has its challenges, but growing up transgender has a whole separate dynamic. Taylor Ray Peek is one of many people who grow up facing the challenges of being transgender and I interviewed him to get a better look inside the mind and life of someone who is transgender.

Being born transgender is something that nobody has control over. We don’t have control over the color of our eyes, the color of our skin, or what our face is going to look like. Being born in the wrong body is one of those things that some people don’t have control over. Much like Taylor: then a very young girl, now a man, Taylor would realize something was, quote, “funky” when his first crush was another young girl at church. Although in the body of a little girl, Taylor would grow up as one of the boys. He reminisced, looking back as a young boy, “I wanted to get dirty with the boys[...] and when all my little boyfriends started peeing standing up I didn’t understand why I couldn’t do it either. Why is it so easy for them and so hard for me?” Taylor laughs as he remembers these feelings so young and what it was like maneuvering his legs in a way so he could try and stretch to pee like all of the other little boys. As he remembered what that felt like, he vividly remembers his more deeper inside feelings, although he had a lack of intuition. With certainty in his eyes, Taylor claimed, “I’ve always been a little depressed even when

I was so young.” I wanted to grasp a better understanding of what the *real* struggle was for a young child waking up in the wrong body every day, so I asked Taylor that exactly. Taylor’s response was, “When I was younger it sucked because I couldn’t do anything about it. I felt like I was out of control and that’s what led to a lot of my issues because I knew there was nothing I could do about it.” A lack of control in how Taylor viewed himself as a young child would throw his dynamic off in a different direction than what the average young boy would have to live with.

One major thing I took from this interview was that the lack of support while growing up transgender will take a toll on someone. Taylor explained people he found he could relate to, “I was 11 years old and I found a trans you-tuber going through the same stuff and I was like ‘Bruh! That’s me!,” he exclaimed with a huge smile on his face. When Taylor started to finally understand himself on a deeper level he said he felt relief, but at the same time he was filled with frustrations. He thought it was stupid that he had to go through this, but nobody else did. Taylor also states, “Then and now, family wise, we didn’t acknowledge it. My mom wasn’t cool with it or with me being gay, or having girls over.” The lack of support at home would cause Taylor’s depression and self harm to worsen. He would turn to self harm because it was the one thing Taylor felt like he did have control over. He was too young to physically change the aspects he didn’t like about himself. Falling deep into self harm, he felt like it was the one thing he had control over because he was in charge of when he chose to do it and where on his body. Knowing anyone, not just Taylor, who is apart of the LGBT community could fall under this category is very important to be aware of. It shows you how little their mind set can break and how much affect of having a support system can have.

There were many more times in Taylor’s life that showed an example of great lack of support. Taylor recalls the night he came out about being transgender to his parents and his mother’s reaction. He vividly remembers peering at the top of the stairs eaves dropping in on his parents talking about him being transgender and as Taylor’s mother is bawling her eyes out she says, “This is all my fault maybe if I hadn’t let Taylor wear boy clothes or if I hadn’t let him do certain things like that then maybe he wouldn’t have grown up to be this way.” Taylor’s lack of support didn’t just end from his mom, but it also ran into friend groups and girlfriends. Taylor smiles and laughs as he remembers one specific girl, “I did have one girl who I thought was my friend in the 6th grade, who just started calling me basically the antichrist and like, it’s a whole experience to go through when you’re 11 years old, walking on the street

and someone starts yelling calling you satan and the antichrist. Yeah, it was interesting.” Nine years ago transgender was a taboo subject. People were not interested in and didn’t even understand the concept of being transgender; let alone the concept gay. Neither were topics of discussion or accepted by society and American culture. Which leads me to the lack of support ,during this time, on an intimate relationship level for people who are apart of the LGBT community. Taylor shares a very intense memory that has stuck with him throughout the years, “Dating sucked because I would try to tell them I was trans and they’d be like ‘No! You’re not allowed to do that! I’m gonna send you to school in all my clothes and make you dress as a girl for a whole entire day and fuck your whole world up!” Taylor annoyingly mocks a past girlfriend. As a young child looking for someone to accept you and love you as who are, being transgender, was and is still not easy for anyone. Even in society today, although LGBT community is not a taboo subject, some people do not understand what struggles someone apart of this community goes through on a day to day basis. Being apart of the LGBT community takes a lot of strength and pride to overcome people who choose to not support them. Taylor firmly stated his opinion on support he gets from people now, “Now, I don’t give a shit. This is who I am you’re going to accept it or not, you’re gonna be here or you can not. It’s cool, its whatever.” Hearing the confidence in Taylors voice tells me that his struggles and the lack of support from his past has only made him a stronger person today.

Being transgender also has it’s challenges because of how you see yourself and how others see you while transitioning. Being transgender consists of constantly trying to blend with the gender you feel like you were born to be. Taylor said as he straightened his posture, “Transitioning wise I never thought I would feel so comfortable in my body, in my entire life and I still don’t because if I could just take the tits off I would just take the tits off but I can’t. Just the fact that I’m able to be okay for now and it not kill me like it used to is just success enough for me.” Something that really caught my attention while transitioning itself was a topic of discussion was when I asked Taylor what he feels like the hardest part will be and he said, “I think watching my mother watch me go through with it is going to be the hardest thing. Yeah, I don’t think its going to have anything to do with me, its going to be the outside looking in that I’m going to have to cope with. Part of me is going to feel guilty because my mom created me and here I am changing completely who she made,” Taylor finishes this thought with his voice quivering and his eyes getting soft. Transitioning is not only a challenge for the person going through it, but the people around, whether they accept it or not, its huge experience and changes everything. It changes everything

from your looks, how others see you, how you see yourself, and its not cheap. It can cost a transgender, female to male, 8-10,000 dollars to have their breasts removed and thats not even what some would consider a complete transition; that is just for breast removal. It's a lot of physical work to blend in with the opposite gender and this will take a serious toll on anyone, regardless how much of their complete selves they are reaching. Taylor also mentions how he is very cautious of how he acts and presents himself. He is very aware of how he projects his voice, how deep it is. He also goes out of ways and makes strong efforts to act as a gentleman would. Most things are easy and can come natural to his state of being like holding a door open, caring for someone or something in a fatherly way rather a way a mother or a woman would, and it even goes as far as blending in as *one of the guys* when he is hanging out with friends. This can mean something as small as being okay with farting around one another because according to Taylor it is something he tries to not care about when he is with *the guys*. Being aware of these things and conscious of how he acts are things that make him feel more confident around all kinds of crowds of people. Taylor just wants the world to see him as he sees himself.

Another huge dynamic or obstacle Taylor faced for a long time was self love. It was hard for him to let other people into this part of his life. He says, "I felt more relief[...] I wasn't lying to my parents anymore, but then again I felt like I let them into a part of my life that I wasn't ready to let them into. It wasn't a thing." In Taylors household, acknowledging his transitioning didn't exist, which only made his search for self love more difficult. As Taylor was constantly trying to blend with the sex he was born to be, his family saw him as they saw him and it made it more difficult for Taylor to be who he was born to be for a long time. Being Taylors friends for 4 years now, looking back, I even saw the small ticks that would remind Taylor of the tough truth. Tough ticks like when people would use incorrect pronouns such as; she or her. Whether they used them because they didn't support Taylor or because they were so adapted to using those pronouns because they had known Taylor for long; it is small things like this that make it harder for a transgender person to love themselves due to the constant reminders of what they are physically and how the world sees them. When Taylor had told his parents he states, "I felt like I was walking around on egg shells because I didn't know. I didn't know anything because my parents didn't really wanna talk about it because she didn't know how to talk about it. She never experienced something like this before." The lack of understanding growing up in Taylors house hold was another obstacle that made self love and acceptance a harder battle. Other things that contributed to his battle for self love was

the lack of control, “A lot of it for me was a control thing. I was apart of something that I literally had no control over. I didn’t pick it,” Taylor explains in a stern voice. For people on the outside looking in, it’s so very important for them to understand that aspect. A lot of people don’t understand and are ignorant to transgender people in the LGBT community because they simply do not understand. I think a big thing that people in the LGBT community want is for people on the outside to just ask. Don’t be afraid to ask questions in order to have a stronger understanding. It’s a huge confidence booster for someone apart of the LGBT community to know they have a say in how people view them and they get that say when you simply ask.

So, how much do you really think we are aware of? What explains the way we see ourselves in the mirror? What particles and atoms and wires in our brains tell us something is wrong? Where does the “gut” feeling come from? After doing this interview, I’m not sure any of these questions where answered, but when we can’t answer these questions for ourselves or for other people there are still things we can do. We can listen to them and understand their version of their story. We all grow up with different dynamics and the word difficult can mean something else to you than it does to Taylor. Everyone has their own levels of tough, but when you meet someone apart of the LGBT community, especially someone who is transgender, it’s important to consider and be aware of their difficult and how much more intense it is compared most likely is to your difficult. For my final questions and thoughts, I asked Taylor what he would want people on the outside to know, “It wasn’t just a fad that I decided to be apart of[...] it wasn’t something I decided one day, this is going to happen. Yeah, just go easy, I haven’t had it easy either. We all have our own struggles, so don’t.... rain on my parade!,” Taylor started off serious and ended with laughing. I can hear how considerate of others feelings he is, that he knows other people in world exist and have problems to. Taylor also wants people going through similar situations to know, “Honest, and this is going to sound super cheesy, but honest to god you just have to keep pushing through it. Like its going to suck 95% of your life until you can figure out how to deal with it, how cope with it, and how to, like overcome the depression and deal with all that, it’s going to suck. It just is. It sucked for me from baby age to lie 16 years old.” Positive ways for Taylor found that helped him cope and deal with all the overwhelming pressures and feelings where things like finding a hobby that takes up a lot of your time and you can focus on hard 100%. Another thing that helped Taylor was getting into a good relationship, whether that be an intimate relationship or a really positive friendship, with a family that supported him,

loved him, and made it okay for him to be who he wanted to be. One last final food for thought is remembering other people exist to. You're not the only one who is struggling to push through every day, Taylor didn't even think that he'd make it to age 18. Everyone has their own dynamics and obstacles of growing up. We are all faced with challenges and in todays society a variety of these challenges are becoming more and more less taboo to talk about. Try talking to someone and listening to their story to understand their struggles before you give up on them.

From Struggles to Success: The Life of a Young Bride and Mother

Myranda Swearingen

“I learned a great deal of values from my grandmother, the majority being that family always comes first in our book. After hearing about everything she had went through just to keep this family she has, I know why it has always been so important and so close to her heart.”

The sound of gossip and memories drifting in from the dining room, or the smell of coffee and handmade tortillas filling my grandmothers small, yellow house. These are the sounds and smells of years past and years to come. A peaceful environment that my childhood had always known. This had not always been this way though. Sacrifices had to be made for us to live a life full of family and love. The person who had made this true sacrifice was my grandmother. Her name is Linda Sigala. For Hispanics, and Mexican women, it is not an uncommon practice to marry young if the circumstances are there. Many Mexican men will look for young, virgin girls to make their wives. By marrying daughters off young, they could guarantee their purity and allow them to be molded into the perfect housewife. When my grandma was married, she was only thirteen. She was married to a man that was 25. When she had her first child, my mother, she was fourteen. For a girl this age to get married so young, it can be a very life changing experience. My grandmother experienced having her decisions made for her, struggling to survive, and the fact that no matter what she had wanted she wouldn't be able to go to school. Although she has gone through these experiences, she never had a doubt in her mind about the importance of family in our culture.

Many Mexican families have some sort of work that their family is known for doing. Whether it be factory work, farm work, or owning restaurants, every family has their niche. For my grandma's family, this was migrant work. When she was thirteen, she had already been working in the tomato fields for quite some time. She met my grandfather through the migrant work that her family did. At the time he asked for her hand in marriage, he was twice her age. As my grandmother explained this, she stated that “It was part of our culture as Hispanics to get married so young” (1:21). Being a thirteen-year-old girl, she did not know whether or not she should go with him. She asked her own mother for guidance and help because that decision was not completely her own. But her mother gave no help and told her that she did

not care and that if she were to get married that she would have one less mouth to feed. Knowing that her mother was an alcoholic, this was not the most surprising answer. Following this, my grandmother was married later that year, a twelve-year age difference sitting between her and her new husband.

As a young bride, you can expect what came next. My mother was born to my grandmother at the age of fourteen. She has two sisters that were born two and four years after her and a brother born eight years after that from her stepfather. By the time my grandmother was eighteen she had already had her three girls. She talked openly with me about the fact that she was not allowed to be on birth control due to her husband's wishes. She explained him as being "a wife beater, and a womanizer. I had learned to be quiet, obedient, and to play with my girls as though they were dolls [or if I was their sister, instead of their mother]" (6:11). My grandpa's name is Jose Guadalupe Rodriguez. As children, we called him grandpa Lupe. I always had thought of him being a good man, always seeming to live life raising cattle and nurturing his restaurant. I never thought of him as being the kind of man that would've ruined my grandmother's childhood. Throughout the interview process, I found myself wondering more and more about their past. I found myself wondering how he could go from being that man that I had looked up to as a child to becoming the bad guy in this tale. I had wondered why he would marry a young girl, knowing what would come with it. While I know he would never open up about his past with my grandma, I wonder if he ever regretted having kids with my grandma.

After having her first baby at 14, my grandma had been faced with the decision to give her first child up for adoption. She never had a choice on whether or not to have her babies so young, because that choice was her husband's decision; since he chose not to put her on birth control, she was pregnant immediately after getting married. Although she was so young, she had never had a second thought raising her babies on her own. She had all three of her girls before the age of eighteen. The nurses, the doctor, and her husband wanted her to put them up for adoption, but she refused. She knew that "I may not be able to take care of them the way you can, because you have everything, but I can take care of them to the best of my ability" (2:50). She would put everything on the line just to raise her own kids. After having her girls, she had divorced from my grandpa at the age of eighteen. The year was 1978, and my grandma had found herself homeless. Looking for work and refuge wherever she could find it. Not even her own mother had enough sympathy to allow her to come back home. Although she didn't always know if she would have somewhere to stay or something to eat, she always took care of her girls. I asked her if

she regretted anything at all, and the only thing that came to mind was that since she did have to have her kids so young, she was never able to go to school.

My grandma had always had the desire to finish school. She had only a middle school education and had always wanted to have a high school diploma. “I never got to experience high school or prom; I spent the best portion of my life raising kids” (8:43). Although my grandma can never say she is a high school or college graduate, she can say that she did the best she could with what she had. Eventually, after her babies got older and after marrying her second husband, she got her GED. It may seem like a miniscule achievement to most, but just for being able to do that, I know that I am so proud of my grandma. If she had the chance to go back to college she told me “I think I would’ve been a teacher [...] I think I would’ve taught elementary level” (8:43). Many years after watching her children grow up and begin their lives, she decided to try going to school one more time. At the age of 49, my grandma was going to take classes to be a medical translator and transcriber. The class was merely a year long, but she knew that even if she did some sort of schooling that it could help out with her pay. Although she had been nearing the end of her course, she never did finish her class. After finding out her second husband had cancer, she knew that she needed to help care for him, so after almost completing her course, she dropped out to help him at home. Although there were many things in life that my grandma could have regretted, it is almost surprising that her lack of school was the only thing that she had felt she missed out on.

While my grandma may have been married young and had little schooling, I can still say that I am so proud of everything that she has been through and accomplished. To this day, she still works a 9-5 job, she still helps to care for her grandchildren, and her great grandchild, and while I know her life has never been easy, I can always say that she has always done anything and everything to take care of her children. I learned a great deal of values from my grandmother, the majority being that family always comes first in our book. After hearing about everything she had went through just to keep this family she has, I know why it has always been so important and so close to her heart. When I had asked her if she had anything else to add, she just told me that “young women need to take care of themselves [...] don’t get pregnant, go to school, be proactive” (20:15). My grandma may only be 59, but I know that no matter how busy she is or how long of a day she has had, I can always find her in the kitchen pressing fresh tortillas on the Comal

or sitting around a table with her daughters after a long day of work, sipping coffee, reminiscing about the past and looking ahead to the future.



Identity

The Memories I Will Never Have

Kassidy Courter

“As I get older and see the way men should actually treat me, I look at this experience as a lesson learned. I also look at him as a father I would never want to parent my children.”

Growing up without a father has been cruel, inconsiderate, and harsh. In the book *The Tender Bar* by J.R. Moehringer, Moehringer faces many obstacles that he must overcome. One of them being that he didn't grow up with his father. Moehringer was able to hear his dad's voice over the radio throughout his life but didn't get to physically see him. Feeling alone but still having mentors, Moehringer gets accepted into a college that he had always dreamt of going to. The biggest battle Moehringer had was having an absent father throughout his young years of life, but with the help of other adults, he is able to still get the full experience of having a mentor. J.R. Moehringer and I share a similar lifestyle. I too always had a father that I was always distant from. Like Moehringer my father was also never sober, and he made me feel like I had to compete with others to keep him in my life.

Throughout my life, my dad was more worried about having a girlfriend than about my sister and me. Moehringer's father avoided him, didn't want him to know where he was or what he was doing, and when Moehringer was only a child his dad tried to sell him in a game. In the book, Moehringer mentions, “There was no point in my regretting his not being around while I was growing up. What I regretted was my own lost opportunity” (168). Moehringer feels that he is more upset that he didn't get to be a son and enjoy having a father, more than he was hurt that his dad wasn't there. My outlook on my father being absent is the same way. He chose not to be here, but I wish I could experience the life of having a second parent. When I was only 10, my dad's wife, at the time, convinced him to move to Florida leaving his family behind. Meanwhile, I was devastated. There isn't a feeling that is worse than a parent just getting up and leaving with no notice, but for him, he was living the dream. From that day forward, I saw my dad differently. I looked at him like I wasn't good enough for him, or worth his time at all. There is no worse feeling than not being able to tell positive stories about your father, or just having memories of your own. Life without him has been tough, but the more I grow up and see that the grass is greener on my side, the more I feel that it is only my father who can have regrets.

Alcohol abuse has always been a huge problem for my dad and his family. Moehringer has many adventures where his dad wasn't sober. One of the first times he met his father, his father wasn't sober and offered to sell Moehringer in a game he was playing with friends. Moehringer explains, "I don't remember him sobering up" (38). Moehringer feels that he doesn't remember in the short experiences he was around his father, him ever being sober. For my sister and me, life was the same. Anytime my sister and I were around our father he was already drunk or drinking. I relate to this quote because this summer my sister went with my dad to an overnight softball tournament. He got completely drunk and the tournament was out of town so my sister had to go with him. So, my father thought it would be a grand idea to drive home drunk. Not only was he putting his life and others life in danger, but he could have easily wrecked and killed my sister. When I found out and confronted him about it he acted like a car accident would never happen to him. My dad thinks he and everyone around him are invincible and that nothing will ever happen to him. To sit and watch my dad put my baby sister's life and other people's lives in danger is just disgusting and frightful.

One should never have to compete with another adult to keep a parent around. For my sister and me, our stepmom made everything a competition when it came to our dad. From having to spend more money than us, having better shoes, or just having my dad's attention more. Everything was always a competition with her, even though that is our dad. For Moehringer, he competed with his father through a simple hug. One of the first times he met his father he hugged his father and felt sudden competition. Moehringer felt if he wasn't strong enough to hug his father, then he wouldn't come back. As Moehringer claims, "If I couldn't hug my father hard enough, if I couldn't grab hold, he wouldn't come back" (36). Moehringer thinks this to himself while he is hugging his father when he was young. My sister and I had similar situations like Moehringer's, but ours were daily. About two years ago, my sister and I went and visited our dad in Florida. He decided to take us shopping and out to eat one of the days that we were there. We already knew there was a conflict between our dad and stepmom because she moved him to Florida to get away from us and we were coming to visit. While we were shopping my sister and I found the exact same shoes we both wanted. They were pricey but my dad said we could have it because they were for school. After our stepmom had heard that he was buying the shoes for us she threw a fit and said that she should get something more expensive because we did. In my eyes, we shouldn't compare to her at

all. My dad thought otherwise and always gave her what she pleased. We lost the little relationship that we did have with our father after this vacation, because anything me and my sister had, she needed too.

In the end, my father lost a relationship with both of his daughters from making mistakes trying to look better to everyone else. In *The Tender Bar*, J.R. Moehringer and I have a similar life when it came to our father's. My father was always distant from me. I had to watch a loved one abuse alcohol. I also had a parent that I felt I had to please to keep around. Like Moehringer, he only heard his dad's voice through a radio. Moehringer also mentions how his dad was always drinking and the very few times he was around his father, he wasn't sober. My sister and I forgave our dad too often for the things he has done, and we have given him multiple chances. As I get older and see the way men should actually treat me, I look at this experience as a lesson learned. I also look at him as a father I would never want to parent my children. Unlike me, Moehringer wanted to meet his father and secretly tried to reach out to him. I wish things were different because I would love to have a second parent to share memories with and learn from. Not a day goes by that I think about how life would be if my father would have just stepped up one time. I used to feel regret as if this were all my fault until I grew up and this whole experience just opened my eyes. If I could go back and change him I wouldn't. As a child, I shouldn't have had to wish for him to be in my life and change his ways. He chose his own path which resulted in not caring for my sister or me and losing a relationship he could have had with us.

College Tuition Is Too Expensive

Tiah Hines

“College needs to be made more affordable because more people will go and study something they prefer, less people would be stressed over debt, and there will be more successful people in the job market.”

What happens to the students who want to receive an education, but cannot afford it? Is this fair? In today’s society the average cost of college tuition for one year is \$34,740 for private schools, \$25,620 for out-of- state residents, and \$9,970 for state residents. With these excessive prices, how can people expect to receive a good education without going into debt? According to Google, statistics show that seven in ten seniors who graduated from public and nonprofit colleges in 2014 had student loan debt with an average of \$28,950 per borrower. It will take most students 10 years to pay off this debt. Education is not valuable when you leave school with so much debt that you are too stressed to enjoy what you have gained. After reading many articles such as, “Should College Be Free” by Deborah Kurfiss, and “ Pros and Cons of Tuition Free College” by Ellen Anderson, I’ve come to the conclusion that the extortionate price of college needs to be decreased immediately. College needs to be made more affordable because more people will go and study something they prefer, less people would be stressed over debt, and there will be more successful people in the job market.

College would be more accessible and people would choose a major they enjoy if the cost was lowered. In the article, “Should College Be Free,” Deborah Kurfiss believes, “The extreme increase in college costs means that fewer and fewer low-income students can attend college, and the wage gap grows larger”(Paragraph 3). Cures to many diseases might be locked away in the minds of low-income people who cannot afford an education. Often times, lower income people feel the need to take a break from school because they can’t balance working to pay loan interest, and school at the same time. Without the weight of paying loans, the college attendance rate would increase rapidly. In the article, “ Pros and Cons of Tuition Free College,” Ellen Anderson suggest that if the cost of college was reduced people would study something more practical and to their liking. She stated, “ If shelling out thousands and thousands of dollars is no longer a factor, parents and students might feel more relaxed about studying for majors that

don't necessarily have a large paycheck associated with them" (Paragraph 5). In other words, if people didn't have to worry about a huge ass debt after college, they could get into a field that they actually enjoy instead of a job that just pays the bills. People also wouldn't have to worry about going into college undecided, and worry about trying to find a major right for them. In my case, I'm a chemistry major, but I don't want to spend the rest of my life doing chemical equations; I know once I graduate from college I will be making more than enough money to pay off my student loan debt, but I don't want to be a chemist. The effort of making college cheaper would open up the door for many people to a brighter future overall.

The cost of college also needs to be reduced because student debt is causing financial stress that people may never recover from. In the article, "The Mental Toll of Student Debt: What Are Survey Shows," Shannon Insler states, "From insomnia to physical symptoms of anxiety to social isolation, student loan-induced stress is threatening to take over the lives of borrowers" (Paragraph 3). Receiving a good education should not come with the price of a medical problem or stress. Education should not come with any burdens because it is solely to help one gain knowledge. However, education should come with the sight of a brighter future once you get done, but the cost is deterring that. According to the same article (Insler, Paragraph 2), statistics prove that 64.5 percent of people reported that they suffered from sleepless nights due to debt. These sleepless nights from stress do not just come from trying to pay off the debt, but it also comes from how it affects people's credit score. A bad credit score can ruin one's future because it affects the chances of getting a house or apartment, a car, and makes people untrustworthy to pay things off. If tuition was reduced significantly or omitted people would not have to worry about payments or their credit score dropping and affecting their entire life in a horrible way. Stress can cause so many things such as high blood pressure and depression, but if the price of college was lessened there would be a remarkable amount of people in the world that are stress free.

Therefore, success would thrive in the job market if the cost of college wasn't a factor. In today's society, without a good education a well-paying job is hard to find. In the article, "Should College Be Free," Deborah Kurfiss explains, "Many more jobs today are knowledge-based or require advanced technical skills than in the past, to the extent that there are sometimes not enough qualified people to fill the positions" (Paragraph 2). Kurfiss is implying that education is basically vital for many jobs, but no one is really qualified because they lack key skills. In my opinion this is because nobody can afford college tuition. If college was made more affordable there would be more people to fill these positions. Reduced

tuition will provide jobs that are pressed for more workers with excess, and this is better for families and as well as the job market.

The ridiculous price of college is a problem that's been going on for years, and something needs to be done. It should not be to the point where people cannot afford to go and people who are attending suffer from stress and depression. The job market should be flourishing with workers, nevertheless the amount of college tuition has impacted that because nobody is qualified to work anywhere. Think about it, if the cost was little to nothing the world would be so much more successful and healthier because people will be qualified to work and would not be stressed. People would not have to worry about if by the time they finished school, will their job be enough to cover the cost of their debt. However, they will be able to excel and be happy within their job field without any burdens of debt. Therefore, diminishing the price will cause more people to go to college, less stressed people, and more certified people in the job market.

Second Chances

Annastazhya Lack

“I decided it was time for me to go home and change my ways. For the author, Wes, and I, these were our turning points. These experiences opened our eyes and we found out how to get on track and to make good decisions; how to triumph in life.”

In the book *The Other Wes Moore*, by Wes Moore, the author shares his and another man’s story about two men with the same name, while the author became a successful college graduate and acquired an amazing career, but the other Wes Moore became a convicted murderer. Wes Moore the author shared his story through a book he wrote and published. He shared to the world his life struggles as well as the other Wes Moore’s story. His iconic, “Same name, different fates” quote introduces what he shares. Wes Moore grows up with similar difficulties as the other Wes Moore. They shared the same name, but through their stories one was led down a successful career and the other, a fate of horror and convicted murder. In the men’s lives, through both the neglect and support system they both had and how the second chances they were gifted affected them in the long run. Through both Wes’s childhoods, they made many mistakes and so have I growing up. After all the second chances that we all had, we continued to make more mistakes, but eventually our support system came in and what the author and I did after these helping hands were the critical part in our lives where we either fly or fall. I personally made many mistakes and relate to the other Wes Moore through parts of my childhood growing up. When my support system came in and started teaching me right from wrong, teaching me to learn how to better myself individually and truly want the best for myself I started to relate to the author, Wes Moore. Even after the mistakes we made, we grew from them and triumphed in life.

Throughout my childhood and the other Wes Moore’s childhood we both made many mistakes. Growing up I didn’t have a two-parent household, nor did I have a single parent watch me at the time due to my mother working most of my childhood. I had a lot of time to grow on my own and to make my own decisions. I started to make my own decisions, some were good, but eventually they turned bad. My life choices started to take a turn for the worse. My own experience reminds me of when the other Wes Moore

started making bad decisions and they also went unnoticed. The only guidance the other Wes Moore had was from his older brother Tony, who was a well-known figure of the streets. Tony was always mentoring Wes and told him if he is ever feeling threatened, to send a message to your opponent. This is all that Wes had for the most part. His mother was a single mom and had no time to take care of two boys, let alone give them the proper guidance they needed. Due to Wes's mothers' neglect one day Wes skipped school to play football with some of his neighborhood's kids when he got into a fight with one of them, Wes retreated into his house while his mother was still at work and grabbed a knife to hurt the boy, his friend Woody tried to tell him not too, but Wes followed the words of his brother Tony, "send a message". From hearing all the commotion of the two boys fighting, while Wes was grabbing his knife, one of the neighbors called the police on the boys. While Wes was too focused on hurting the boy with the knife in his hand, he paid no attention to the cops surrounding the area. This is where the other Wes Moore made one of his biggest mistakes. He went after the boy with the knife and the cops soon arrested him before he got the chance to hurt the other boy. The author Wes Moore wrote about the other Wes Moore's thoughts, "Wes sat there, pondering his next step. He didn't want his mother to know he been arrested. She would probably ground him at least. It was summer, and that was the last thing he wanted. He used his one phone call to call his brother in Murphy Homes" (35). On top of getting arrested, he made another mistake by not calling or telling his mother and had his brother and his brothers father pick him up from the police station. His mother never found out about all his bad decisions until years later. I can relate to the other Wes's bad decisions on a personal level. Growing up with my little sister, she would always antagonize me, so I thought to myself that I was older than her she shouldn't treat someone older than her this way, so I thought I would teach her a lesson and physically hurt her. On one of the days my mother was working and I was supposed to watch my sister, she started to act up and since I was watching her I thought she had to listen to me, I started to push her and she was being even more ignorant than she was, so I started to hit her and we got physical and eventually after the fight was over, she had called the police on me. I was soon arrested and held in the juvenile detention center overnight waiting for my mother to come and get me. While I sat and waited overnight pondering my choices, I thought I was right and that I shouldn't have been punished. Because I thought I was right, the bad decisions did not stop there; they kept going just like the other Wes Moore's decisions.

The other Wes Moore and my bad decisions did not stop until we got the ultimate second chance. I was arrested again for fighting and was not allowed to come back home, just like how the other Wes Moore had shot Ray and was arrested and put on trial. One night when the other Wes had a new girl over and it was way past the time, she needed to be home, Wes had walked her out when they saw someone waiting for them. The man who was waiting outside Wes's door, was Ray, which was the girl's cousin. Ray started yelling at the girl and Wes. The yelling from Ray soon turned into physically fighting between Wes and Ray. Wes did not favor the feeling of getting beat up in his territory. From all of Wes's adrenaline he could not think clearly. Wes retreated into his house and got a gun, shot Ray and ran home past his mother while she asked a lot of questions and he stated, "Without even looking back, told her nothing was wrong and to go to bed. The blood on Wes's face and clothes, and the weapon in his hand, told a different story" (105). Wes was a little bit older now, but he never strayed from his old ways of "sending a message". This was one of Wes's ultimate bad decisions of harming someone else. He did get arrested and went to trial but was soon released. I didn't kill anyone, but I did get into another fight, this time with my mother. When my mother called the police and I was arrested I did not get to go back home. I was transported to a group home with kids that were struggling in life like me. Like the other Wes Moore, I did have to be away from my home for a while, until my choices and decisions got better.

My bad decisions came to a turning point just like the author, Wes Moore. Wes realized this when he was in military school, while I was thousands of miles away from my family. After I was done in the group home I still did not get to go home, so my mother and I drove out to California where I spent the next year at. The author Wes Moore's turning point was when he was away in military school due to fighting and making bad decisions by trying to gain respect. He was away from his own family. He saw that one of his mentors in the military school was a very young man, younger than all the other authority figures and he was one of the most well-respected men. The author Wes Moore stated, "In spite of myself, I was impressed. I had never seen anything like that before. I had never seen a man, a peer, demand that much respect from his people. I had seen Shea demand respect in the neighborhood, but that was different. This was real respect, the kind you can't beat or scare out of people" (96). Wes had found out what proper, right decisions meant. It was the respect that the young man, Ty Hill, had earned with good decisions. I found the real meaning of good decisions and where they can take me, when my mother

dropped me off in California. But even so, my bad decisions, my bad choices, had followed me. It wasn't until later when my Auntie who was taking care of me in California, decided to make her own bad decisions and while I wasn't paying attention to my own decisions, I paid attention to hers. I realized how bad and inappropriate she was acting, was exactly how I was acting with my bad decisions. I was doing bad in school and had no help with anything due to my Auntie's bad decisions, neglect and her lack of help. I did not want to end up like her, or go through the things her bad choices had led her to. I decided it was time for me to go home and change my ways. For the author, Wes, and I, these were our turning points. These experiences opened our eyes and we found out how to get on track and to make good decisions; how to triumph in life.

The other Wes Moore was long gone from saving due to his lack of support from his loved ones. From the neglect of his mother and father, to his big brother, Tony's negative guidance, Wes started out failing. For Wes, the author, he as well, started out in the same position as the other Wes. For both men coming from poverty and bad reputations, without the proper guidance and support; you fail in society. The other Wes did not have any support for himself, nor his family. He strayed down the wrong path that his life threw at him, with no help from anyone or anything around him. As the other Wes maybe wanted better for himself, his moral understanding term of better, was different than the author Wes's insights of better. The other Wes had many opportunities to better himself, but it wasn't enough for him and he soon ended up in his past ways of dealing with what his life brought him. He strayed down his wrong path and never looked back. His life had finally thrown him his last curve ball, when he soon ended up in prison, again. This time for attempting to rob a bank and involving in a shootout. All of Wes's bad decisions had added up and his fate was waiting to oppress him. Wes would be facing the rest of his life behind his prison's bars. For the author, Wes, his life brought him more opportunities and they opened him up to walk down the right path in life. He did not only want better for himself, but his family wanted the best for him and did everything they could to help Wes get on the right track. Wes's family had sacrificed almost everything into Wes's wellbeing. They wanted to see him success, and soon after that, Wes wanted to triumph for himself. From all the opportunities life had given me, to the curve balls life threw and I endured, I soon wanted better for my own wellbeing. With my family and loved ones who realized I was straying down the wrong path, the other Wes's path, they saw and helped me be a better

and more successful me. They did not want to see me fail in life and I, myself, realized I did not want to fail. My loved ones showed and taught me many things about becoming a successful being. Whether it was intentional or not, they showed me the path I should walk down, how to get there, and what not to do. With all the realization, support, and help I have had, I can say I have triumphed in life. I now know what to do and how to get there, and that I will always have positive attributions I can rely on and go to if my life ever throws another curve ball.

Success Without College

Daphne Latcher

“No matter what a person shows an employer, the personality trait that triumphs talent is passion. The passion and desire is the attribute we need that will contribute to a company.”

Too many people hate their lives because they hate their jobs. Nevertheless, they are forced to stay in that career field because of their college degree. What if going to college is a mistake? Many Americans are told the tall tale growing up, that in order to be successful one must finish college. Has it ever occurred to people, that in the job industry success can come without a college degree? Mike Rose wrote, “Blue Collar Brilliance” to express the importance of skills in the work industry, no matter the job title. In the world we live in today, companies want to see what a person is capable of rather than a certificate of completion. Mike Rose uses his mother and uncle, as I would celebrities, to prove it is possible for a person to be successful without furthering their education if they gain personal development, career skills, and ambition.

Today in America obtaining personal development is the first key in reaching success without college. In order to maximize one’s potential, people must set goals to enhance skills and qualities for employment. Mike Rose, in his essay “Blue Collar Brilliance” often sat at his mother’s job, where he observed how his mother grew her waitress skills over time. In fact his mother “...quit school in the seventh grade to help raise her brothers and sisters” (180). Despite the lack of her education, she managed to personally develop a learning method introducing “psychology” to keep the customers happy, for her tips depended it. Rose records his mother’s actions as “The restaurant became the place where she studied human behavior, puzzling over the problems of her regular customers and refining her ability to deal with people in a difficult world. She took pride in *being among the public*, she’d say. *There isn’t a day that goes by in the restaurant that you don’t learn something* [emphasis in original]” (180). When Rose’s mother first started serving, she probably had the minimum job requirements to get her hired. As his mother progressed in her occupation she maximized her potential and improved herself overall. I have heard multiple stories similar to this one, where a person can start off with little knowledge about a job. Once that

person gets some hands on training, the world could not hold them back from retaining the information they receive. No curriculum in college provide courses that will teach students how to be a lifelong learner. In other words, college cannot prepare us for the job industry, so avoid being in debt and do not attend for it is not beneficial.

When an employer is looking for an employee, his or her main focus is to hire the candidate that fits the job description's career skills. Every job will require some type of skill that is needed for different work environments. In "Blue Collar Brilliance" by Mike Rose, the author mentions how his uncle, Joe Meraglio, started at the bottom of his job and worked his way up after dropping out of the ninth grade. The writer goes in depth about how his uncle was able to become successful in the production industry. In the essay, Rose analyzed the skills that brought his uncle to the vast variety of multiple opportunities. Everyone need to start somewhere, for Joe, "... he joined the Navy, returned to the railroad, which was already in decline, and eventually joined his older brother at General Motors where, over a 33-year career he moved from working on the assembly line to supervising the paint-and-body department" Rose notes (180). Joe used each job he had to build upon his career skills. When employers saw how much experience Roses' uncle had it was without a doubt he got hired. Each job improved his skills as he worked hands on, moving himself up the ladder becoming his own boss. There are countless millionaires in the world today, that became wealthy without attending college. If they did attend, they did not graduate because of how worthless a college degree is in the state of prosperity. Take Mark Zuckerberg for example, who created Facebook from his college dorm room. Zuckerberg dropped out of college, failing to get a degree, because he found how to make money getting people to communicate effectively using a social network. Getting a college degree was useless, because it would not have caused him to be any more successful than he is today. From singers, to actors, to entrepreneurs, to railroad workers etc. the similarities between the careers is that each one of them have skills. People find out what they are good at, then apply them back to the job industry and work their way to the top. There is no need to waste money on a college education because college degrees are based off of curriculum and how much information a student can retain. It is almost impossible for a university to create a curriculum around what's going on in different career fields before time changes things. The institution is focused on educating students about things they will never use in

life. Instead of inhabiting learning skills that will be used for career experience, which will land anyone a job where it is easy to become successful.

In general an average person grows up wanting to become something in life; ladies and gentleman that spark is what we call ambition, which indicates that ambition is what everyone need in order to be successful. Referring back to “Blue Collar Brilliance” where Rose explains how his uncle demonstrates ambition by being persistent in his career choice. Joe’s determination to work hard is one of the reasons to why he was successful in life. There will be times in our lives that we have obstacles that appear too big for us even for Joe, who faced many challenges. Moreover, they were tough obstacles he “...became a consummate multi-tasker, evaluating a flurry of demands quickly, parceling out physical and mental resources, keeping a number of ongoing events in his mind, returning to whatever task had been interrupted, and maintaining a cool head under pressure of grueling production sells,” Rose records (181). As an enthusiastic employee seeking to achieve great things in his existence, Joe pushed through the struggles that came with the job. No matter what a person shows an employer, the personality trait that triumphs talent is passion. The passion and desire is the attribute we need that will contribute to a company. Which is why Joe stood out to his boss from ever other candid; he was that man for the job. Where would the most successful people be if they lacked ambition? Maybe in their parents basement. Numerous people think they have to graduate college first in order to obtain a mind set to conquer the world. False. One of the most famous models today, Kim Kardashian, never attended college; in her blog she explains why college was not for her. Kim, made a good decision in her life that helped her save time and money. Eventually she grew the urge for expanding her career beyond modeling. With her ambitious spirit, Kim started her own make-up line, currently starring in her family’s television show, and more. Proving that no one truly needs a college degree to contribute to today’s society, only a determining mind set to become successful and live comfortably.

Mike Rose used his mother and uncle, as I did celebrities, to prove we can avoid wasting four years of our life at a university because a college degree is not needed in order to be successful. Anyone can achieve success, if they are willing to commit to a life-long term of maximizing their potential, which will cause one to evaluate themselves on how well the do something. After the evaluation, using that skill, one must be ambiguous enough to never stop until they reach the top.

Education: Effect on Minorities

Dre'Shaun Sanders

“Do you really think I’m able to focus only on school on a regular basis? My life is hard, but I will not be another statistic, I will become the author and write my own story. No more being the reader.”

Literacy is like an invisible name tag. People label you based off how “literate” you are whether that’s reading, writing, or talking. In Malcolm London’s “Highschool Training Ground” he talks about how in school students are labeled “Regulars” and “Honors” and based off these labels they are taught different and treated different, yet they still go home and live amongst each other. The education system is set up for us to fail, as “minorities” we are striped of many opportunities before we even make it to 18 years old. We are told that we have to read, write, and talk a certain way, and we are taught things that we have no relation to. The education system should be different based off of ethnic backgrounds, then it will be more relatable to students.

If I read write and talk a certain way they’re quick to label me as illiterate, but they didn’t grow up how I grew up and where I grew up. We are forced to be a certain person and if we fail to be that person they label us as “regular”. As Malcolm London puts it, “...but reading does not matter when you feel your story is already written.” (para.4). London’s point is that as minorities the “system” already anticipates that we will either be dead or in jail or stuck in the Ghetto living from paycheck to paycheck. Growing up in low income neighborhoods I saw the same things year after year, schools were closing one by one, people getting stopped and handcuffed, junkies and addicts on every block, its like they were stuck there. They basically were. Every day of my life there’s a new problem to deal with, like trying to figure out how my family is going to eat and how the bills are going to get paid because my mom is a single mom and her 2 jobs aren’t enough. Do you really think I’m able to focus only on school on a regular basis? My life is hard, but I will not be another statistic, I will become the author and write my own story. No more being the reader. Being a minority, we have a lot of things to deal with that aren’t school related, and honestly it makes learning much harder. If we can handle everything put on our plates daily then we are more than qualified to be an “Honors” student.

Doing everything the way the education board what's you to is unfair to minorities. We don't live a fairytale life like most of our Caucasian peers, so we can't relate to Shakespeare. Why don't they give us work that we can relate to? It lowers our confidence when we can't understand the work they give us. Malcolm London states, "I hear education systems are failing, but I believe they're succeeding at what they're built to do," (para. 5). Basically, London is saying that the education system is set up in a way to keep us in a reoccurring cycle. When I was in high school I asked my English teacher, "Why do we always have to read Shakespeare and other white authors but never any black authors?", she told me, "This is what the they [Education Board] give us to teach you, we can't change it." Being able to relate to a book or passage makes it more enjoyable and easier to learn. Recently I came across a post on twitter, it stated, "Why is their [Caucasian] history being taught as a core curriculum class but mine [African American] is only taught as an elective?" This explains my point pretty well, we are forced to learn the things they want us to lean. Give us the option to choose what we learn, everyone deserves equal opportunity in the classroom.

In school we are separated at a young age by how "smart" we are. Labeled honors and regulars, being taught different materials. Honors and regular students should be taught the same things, just because it may take them longer to understand it doesn't mean they can't learn it. Kids look at labels, and if they aren't "honors" they immediately feel like they are smart enough and that could last throughout life. As London puts it, "This is a training ground to sort out the Regulars from the Honors, a reoccurring cycle built to recycle the trash of this system." (para. 2) In other words, London believes they want to divide us by how "smart" we are. I believe that being smart is more than just taking a test and getting a score, standardized test are harsh and insufficient when it comes to measuring someone's smarts if you ask me. I was an honors student and there were people that were more capable than me that weren't even give the opportunity. Everyone should be treated equal and have the same opportunity to be successful. How about we label everyone as honors and see where that get us.

With an education system set up for my people to fail we have to prove everyone wrong, we are literate, we aren't just regular people. We are taught things that we can't relate to, we are told to do things a certain way and we are penalized if we don't meet the standards, how is this not a training ground set up for us to fail? We have to prove them wrong and show them that we are just as capable as them, even

though all of the things we have to deal with on a daily basis. We don't have to be the reader anymore, we can be the authors to our story.

An Ethical Dilemma and a Young Boy's Choice

Ella Sonderegger

“He was a part of something bigger than himself, good or bad, he didn't care because he was making that money and being successful.”

Growing up we are influenced by our surroundings. In *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, we see many of examples of how environment can affect what influences you and where you gain or loose opportunity. Wes Moore 1 grew up without a father and was raised by his mother and his grandparents in the Bronx. Wes Moore 2 also grew up without a father and with a single mother. Both, Wes 1 and Wes 2, face obstacles growing up and not entirely because of the lack of support or a father figure. They both found support in their community in different ways. They found support in being a part of drug gangs, going to pristine private schools, and making friends in privileged and non privileged environments. In *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, we learn a lot of different ways that each Wes is influenced by things they face in their environment. Environment is a leading factor of influence and opportunity for young people. In *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore we see examples of this from neighborhoods, schools, and an overall community.

In *The Other Wes Moore*, Wes 2 struggle to find the right direction when he is faced with a community that is already in shambles. We are introduced to one of the communities he spend some of his time in with, “The seventeen-story monoliths were among the most dangerous projects in all of Baltimore...And the drug game was everywhere, with a gun handle protruding from the top of every tenth teenagers waistline. People who lived in The Murphy Homes felt like prisoners. Kept in check by rolling bands of gun strapped kids and a nightmare army of drug friends” (Moore 27). This was one of many of small communities that Wes 2 would spend time with his older brother Tony. Tony always taught Wes 2 to send a message to someone as needed. By this he meant to not let anyone walk all over you and to use violence. He taught Wes 2 lessons like this in these dangerous communities. Wes 2 would always remember these words from his older brother Tony and they would influence him later on in situations where he could choose to walk away, but wouldn't. Wes 2 would find himself sending a message in situations where he would get in fights with other boys in the community. Wes 2 had brought a knife into

a fight when he was just eight years old, but was stopped by a police officer. Times in The Murphy Homes would train Wes 2 for these situations, “Some days, Tony would have Wes and woody meet him at The Murphy Homes, when he would assembly a group of Murphy Home’s boys... At Tony’s command, Wes, Woody, and the boys from the projects would start wrestling and punching one another...like pit bulls in a dog fight” (Moore 33). At a young age this trained Wes 2 and many other young boys to learn how to fight, to defend themselves in situations. This is an environment factor due to the time and place Wes 2 grew up in. If Wes 2 had grown up in a less impoverished community, that wasn’t adapted to the drugs and violence that came with it, young boys, like Wes 2, wouldn’t be as likely to be influenced or taught to send a message. If Wes 2 grew up in a more developed community, a community without gang violence or drugs, he may have been taught to handle situations differently and could have had more positive influencers.

Wes 1, the author of *The Other Wes Moore*, family is left to move to the Bronx due to the pressure of work and children was becoming too much for Wes 1’s mother, so they would end up moving to live with Wes’s grandparents. The morning they left Maryland and made their way to the Bronx, a few streets away from where he would be staying with their grandparents the first impression they had was, “We’d stopped at a red light at the corner of Paulding and Allerton avenues when we saw a women walk up to a young boy standing on the corner...The boy, no older than sixteen, darted his head back and forth apparently looking for cops, customers, or both. As she approached him they started talking, the light turned green and my mother quickly hit the gas” (Moore 38). To Wes’s mother, who grew up in he Bronx when she was younger, she was taken to shock when she had seen what she left Maryland for. She was concerned about the community and environment that she would finish raising her children in. When they got to Wes’s grandparent’s house, Wes’s mother complains in worry, “... a telephone pole she’d noticed outside their house that had been converted into a make shift memorial. There was a picture of a young girl taped to the pole and sympathy cards and tiny stuffed animals were scattered around it” (Moore 40). This had concerned Wes’s mother because the picture of the girl taped to the pole had been murdered and she moved here to take the pressure off of being a single mother, but she had moved to a community where other pressure would arise. Wes 1 would be faces with these pressures as a young boy and would have to make decisions that would be influenced upon him from the community he was in and the friends he would make to the school we would go to. Wes 1 would make friends with people in the

Bronx community who were apart of the negative activities that occurred in the community. Wes1 was also friends with people from the private school he attended. This would leave Wes 1 feeling like he had to pick sides and choose which environment would influence him.

Wes 1 would have different environment that would influence his actions from how he would behave in his neighborhood and at the private school Riverdale that he was attending. After what Wes 1 and his mother witnessed on their move to the Bronx she would be influenced to make this next move, “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). Wes 1 now attends private school where he gets the chance to leave the ghetto and the dangerous streets of the Bronx to live a better lifestyles and gain a better education than he would at the public schools. He has made friends at private school and in the Bronx community and tries to bring the two different communities together so he can live both lifestyles. He does this because he had friends in the Bronx that had negative feelings of the private school, Riverdale. He wanted to bring the two communities together for a chance for both sides to see that they can co-exists. He does this by planning a basketball game that fails. Fight broke out between the two due to indifference; that sprung from the separate parties upbringing in their completely different communities. Both sides, the Bronx boys and Riverdale boys, came in with prejudice. This has a huge impact on Wes 1 because he wanted his friends to get along. If his friends would have gotten along I feel that Wes 1 would have less influence from the streets of the Bronx to do things that could and would get him near arrested; like putting graffiti on walls. Wes 1 shares his thoughts on his private school with, “Riverdale. The pristine campus and well dressed kids had stunned me on my first visit-the Bronx was not the homogenous ghetto I thought it was. I felt a crazy-making cross current of emotions whenever I stepped onto campus. Every time I looked around at the buildings and trees and view of the river, I was reminded of the sacrifices my mother was making to keep there. And every time I looked at my fellow students I was reminded of how little I fit in” (Moore 52). Feeling as if he didn’t in, Wes 1, wouldn’t take advantage of the sacrifices his mother was making and would fall into the streets of the Bronx. He could have taken advantage of the education he was getting, but Wes 1 didn’t want to go to school. He didn’t want to be at Riverdale. He felt as though he was always trying to fit in with the environment at Riverdale. He would even go as far as to wear his sister’s jeans because of the lack of clothes his mother could afford so he could stay “fit” and cool. He hated going to school hearing about all the nice vacations everyone would go and not being able to relate with them. He

had that constant reminder of how he didn't fit in there. This would influence Wes 1 to lean more towards the Bronx and its violent behaviors and environment.

At the same time Wes 1 was struggling to fit in and trying to find a balance between the pristine environment at Riverdale and the Bronx streets, Wes 2 was finding his own ways to fit in and make a day's worth. Wes 2 wanted to make money to feel like he was something and to be a part of something more. He was tired of having last season's shoes and wearing the same cloths. He saw his older brother Tony with fresh cloths constantly. He wanted something worth his time to do instead of being at home or school. The Baltimore streets taught him he could, "After hearing more details, Wes was sold. It seemed like a sweet setup. Simply wear a headset, hang out with new friends, notify people when you see police coming and get paid at the end of the day. He knew what game this was, the same game that had consumed Tony and put a bullet or two in him" (Moore 58). After coming across someone on the street wearing nice clothes and cool headset, Wes 2 immediately knew he wanted the same thing. He thought the headset was cool so he approached this boy was a look out for people selling on the streets. He learned all he had to do was be a lookout and make money and this intrigued him because it was easy money. What felt like almost instantly Wes 2, was making enough money to have stacks and stacks of shoe boxes and other fresh cloths. This made Wes 2 feel good about himself because he was making easy money and fitting into the environment and community he lived in. He was a part of something bigger than himself, good or bad, he didn't care because he was making that money and being successful. He found something he was good at outside of school; especially since he skipped most days and didn't apply himself due the lack of care on the school's staff part. This was the first major step in the wrong direction that Wes 2 made. Rather than strictly sticking with school, the environment and community he was in he was constantly influenced to take the easy route. In this case, in Baltimore, the easy rout was being apart of the drug game and selling. On a day of skipping school, Wes 2 and his friends, would have a cook out and smoke his mother's weed. After coming home from a days filled with being high from smoking he goes to his room to hide from his mother and her and boyfriend and he came to realize, "And he understood, faintly, how addictive that could be, and how easy it would be to make some money selling that feeling to people who needed it"(Moore 62). After had been a lookout boy for a minute and now having smoking weed for the first time, Wes 2 sees and understands how easy it really was to make real good money from it. This was another influence for Wes 2 sees and understands how easy it really was to make real good money from it. This

was another influence for Wes 2 because not only had he just started making a lot of money by just being a look out, but now he has smoked weed himself and understand why people buy drugs. He understood the feeling it gave people and why it was addictive from making money off of it, he could see why people would want to be a part of it. And it was another influencing factor that he was always around to fulfill his needs and wants and others too.

Wes 2 was starting to hustle and make money in fast easy ways that his brother Tony would soon catch on to. Wes's 2 older brother Tony started to notice all the new clothes and shoes that Wes 2 was obtaining and Tony immediately knew how Wes 2 was getting these things. Wes 2 was lying to his mother saying he was a DJ and he would make the money DJing for people's parties, but Tony wasn't buying it. Tony got mad at Wes even though Tony was the man who was selling and teaching Wes to *send a message*, he didn't want Wes a part of the same game he was in because it was dangerous. Tony gave Wes a literal beating for it and in *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore, it was stated, "Tony was exhausted. Tired from repeating himself. '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 72). Tony made this statement to Wes 2 after giving him his final warning about being in the game. Tony always urged Wes to stay away from the game and stay focused on the school. Although Tony was trying to be a good role model it wasn't effective because Tony had been doing the same thing. Tony had been in the game since he was a young boy and this made it hard for Wes to take his older brother, Tony, seriously. He didn't care about what Tony had to say or warn him about. He was making good money and that's all he knew. Wes 2 ignored his brother Tony and continued to make his way up in the drug game. Now Wes 2 wasn't just a look out guy, he was doing the selling himself and he was getting whatever he wanted, including girls. One of the first girls Wes 2 gets involved with he ended up getting her pregnant, but that didn't stop Wes 2 from sleeping around with other girls. Wes 2 would sleep around with all kinds of girl and one of these girls had a guy follow her. She was leaving Wes's house and the guy had caught her. The girl Wes was sleeping with and this guy, Ray, got into an argument outside of Wes's house. Wes heads outside to watch the fight and eventually is brought into it. After being taken down by this gut, Wes takes actions, "Wes went inside, but he had no intention of staying there...Wes opened the box, grabbed the gun and clips...He ran down the stairs and out the door...Wes chased after him. As they ran he and his friends pointed their weapons in Ray's direction and began taking shots"(Moore 104). Now that Wes was in the

game he was getting whatever he wanted, even years later. He was still hearing Tony's voice in his head telling him to *send a message*. Wes and his friend caught up to Ray and eventually nailed a shot on him. Wes ran back home to hide the gun in the bottom of a fish tank and clean himself up. After cleaning up, the police had arrived and arrested him. Not only was Wes a part of an environment where situations like this were invited due the drug and gang violence, but he also had a friend that was willing to join him and support him in his actions. Wes 2 could have stayed inside and not taken it as far as to chase Ray around with a gun and shoot him, but it was something he had learned and had become accustomed to by this point. Wes 2 was raised in the environment and community where gang violence was normality and something a part of the daily life, it was a career for a lot of the people around him.

Wes 1 tells about his struggles to stick with school, how his mother handles it, and where it leaves him. She had started to get tired of it and threatened to send him to military school. Wes 1 continued to let his friends influence him to do things like skip school and graffiti walls. This landed Wes 1 in military school and put him in an entirely different environment. An environment that wasn't drug and gang filled and environment that didn't look at your social class. This would be completely new community that Wes 1 would have no choice, but to accept for the better and would help him grown up in a structured environment; unlike Riverdale, where the staff didn't care about him and the Bronx streets where he was friends with people who encouraged him to do things that landed him in the bad of a squad care. While at military school, Wes 1 was relentless at first. He tried running away four times the first four days and eventually gave in to staying when he was tricked. The boys in the military school made it clear to Wes 1 that he was there to stay and to learn their ways. Wes 1 grew up to become the youngest highest rank there and looked over the largest number of boys within the military school. Attending military school matured and grew Wes 1 strengths in a way that would not have happened if his mother didn't force him out of the street of the Bronx or even the pristine walls of Riverdale.

In *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore we learn a lot about environment and the influences it has a young children growing up. We are given two different young boys who grew up in the same community, just streets a part, who lives two separately completely lives. Wes 1 was a boy who migrated to the Bronx streets with his family. He would form a group of his friends he fit in well with when it came to social class and he attended a school where he did not. The group of friends he made at home in his neighborhood were closer to the influences of gangs, drugs and violence. Not all of these things interested

Wes 1, but he ended up leaning towards those more because of the un-welcomed vibes from Riverdale. At Riverdale he was surrounded by children who were better off when it came to terms of money and living. This made it hard for Wes 1 to be comfortable in the learning environment and it made it harder for him to care to be there. Finding himself in both environments, Wes 1 would essentially fall in-between the cracks of both and would be sent off to military school to become grow up to be the person he needed to be. Wes 2 never had the opportunity to go to a pristine school. He was always in one environment, the Bronx streets. Wes 2 was constantly surrounded by everything that was wrong in his and other local communities. Wes 2 was more influenced by drugs, gangs, and violence because it was all he grew up to know. He never had a chance to leave the dangerous environment in the first place and this left him to only know the things that came with the dangerous environment. The opportunities that sprout from the environments that young children grow up in have influence on the life they choose to live. It becomes a matter of survival for them and when you live in gang and drug flooded streets you do what you can to meet each day's end.

The Power in Trust

Kassidy Courter

“Like Baker, I wasn’t confident in my writing either. I now have found trust in my writing, but I always have in the back of my head, it can always be better.”

Growing up in a household of a single mom, my sister and I always read. My mom made us read to distract us, so she could clean. She made us read as a punishment when we weren’t getting along. My story is a lot like the essay, “One Writer’s Beginnings” by Eudora Welty. Welty explains how from a young age she was encouraged to read all the time. Her parents read everything, so she followed in their footsteps. On the other hand, learning how to write fell in place after reading so much. I share a similar experience with the essay, “Learning to Write” by Russell Baker. Baker was displeased when he found out who his English teacher was going to be. He had a mindset that it was going to be an awful year, but after writing an essay, Baker is satisfied when he hears the outcome. My experiences are a lot like Welty and Baker. Reading these essays, I have felt like they both have written about my life experiences. One thing I took from both of them is to trust myself. For Baker, he had to learn to trust in an informal essay. Welty had to trust the voice in her head that she heard often while reading.

Like Welty, I grew up with books everywhere in my house. My mom read a book and then would put it back on the shelf for my sister or me. Reading became a passion for both of us through our parents just making us read. Welty explains, “I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our home, at any time of the day, was there to read in, or to be read to” (206). In this quote, Welty clarifies that in her household there was never a time that they couldn’t read or have a place to read. For me, we had “reading time” at my house. Every day after school my sister and I were to read a few chapters of our library book, mainly because we had book reports due the next day. However, we still chose to read in our free time. Our mom would also read us a book before bed every night, and then she would make us tell her what the book was about. Reading has always been my go to. When I’m sad, mad, or happy, I read because I feel calm afterward.

High school teachers can be hard to read, but there's always talk about them and how they teach. For Baker, he gets assigned a teacher that he already had imagined how his teacher was going to be.

In his essay, Baker says that his teacher is, “stuffy, dull, and hopelessly out to date” (188). When Baker was assigned his first formal paper, he goes blank. He writes an informal paper for himself but runs out of time to write a formal paper for class. After Baker stresses for a couple days, his teacher gives back all of the essays except Baker’s. Then Baker says, “And he started to read. My Words! He was reading my words out loud to the entire class” (189). As Baker explains in his quote the teacher chose to read his essay to the class. After reading this essay, I felt it could have been mine. I too was in high school English when my first essay was published. My English teacher was the teacher, nobody wanted to take. Everybody switched out of her class within the first week and even I tried to switch, but my mom insisted that I try to stay. So I did and I ended up getting the most success out of her class that I had in my entire years of high school. Like Baker, I found success in a class I really didn’t want to take. Like Baker, I wasn’t confident in my writing either. I now have found trust in my writing, but I always have in the back of my head, it can always be better.

Trust is the key to success. Welty and Baker both have two different stories, one about reading, one about writing. The outcome of their stories is nearly the same. Welty found trust in the voice she heard in her head while reading. In her essay, she claims, “It isn’t my mother’s voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it” (209). Welty is describing the voice in her head that she hears while reading. The voice that Welty heard, had power, the power of the reader’s voice reaching her. Welty ends her essay by saying, “I have always trusted that voice” (209). On the other hand, Baker found trust in himself. Trust in his own words, and in his own voice. While Baker’s teacher is reading his essay aloud to the class, Baker thinks to himself, “I did my best to avoid showing pleasure, but what I was feeling was pure ecstasy at this startling demonstration” (189). Baker felt pure happiness while his teacher was reading his essay aloud. Although Baker’s essay wasn’t formal, his words and the essence of the essay caught his teacher’s eye. Baker then says, “I had discovered a calling. It was the happiest moment of my entire school career” (189). Baker now feels confident with his writing and trust in his own words.

In the end, both authors had stories that touched me. While reading these essays I felt like I was taking a walk down memory lane, from finding my love for books through my parents, like Welty, to now being confident in my writing through a teacher publishing my essay, like Baker. Now, I trust the voice I hear when I read, and my own words I spill all over a paper while I write. Welty ends with, “By now I don’t

know whether I could do either one, reading or writing, without the other” (209). I feel the same way. Writing leads to reading, as reading can lead to writing. They fall together as one thing, but first, we all must find passion in one.

Skills Worth Knowing

Chey Gericke

“My life was turning upside down on me fast. I was about to lose myself. I took the chance and enrolled in college hoping that this will make a difference with my depression . . . For me, my depression is my prison. Going to college is my beginning to being set free.”

Many people don't realize how something like reading and writing can effect your life. It's a skill we apply almost daily. I am manic-bipolar depressed and ADHD, so things aren't always the easiest. Its hard for me sometimes. Reading and writing is going to be a part of my salvation into having a better and happier life with my kids. I am seeking my dream and goal of becoming an RN. I see myself being similar to Fredrick Douglass. He was a slave when he found his refuge being taught and teaching himself to read and write. In, “How I learned to read and write”, Douglass describes how reading and writing was a way for him to feel free from his life of slavery. Being a slave and it meant more to him than just learning. He was overcoming a struggle. It would allow him to be more, to know more, to be free. I can relate, in some ways, with Douglass. For myself dealing with depression is something that I struggle with on a daily basis. It is something that holds me prisoner. Returning back to school is a way for me to escape. Both Douglass and I both see reading and writing as a way to be set free.

Everyone has a reason why they want to escape. For Douglass and I, applying reading and writing was our way. When I was younger, I didn't read very much as it wasn't something that interested me. I do recall reading some books in class; however, that was the extent of it. One thing that I did enjoy doing was writing little stories. It was a way for me to express myself. I wanted to be like my mother and be able to open a book and enjoy. My mother always had a book in her hand. Stephen King was her favorite author. She enjoyed his novels as they were filled with mystery. Every time I saw her, she pretty much had one of his novels. I actually didn't start to enjoy reading until I was a teenager. I remember when I was living with my dad in Hamilton, Missouri. At my dad's there was a barn and a large amount land. There was also a house that was used for storage. As any kid would do, I explored. I decided to go into the house one day and what I discovered was a little collection of old books. Books filled with many different love stories. One that I really enjoyed reading was about a vampire who ends up falling in love with a mortal. That was

my Twilight before there was Twilight. It was an escape for me. Reading allowed me to open my mind and visualize what I was reading. That was my escape hatch. I could only imagine how Douglass felt when he was able to use reading and writing to escape. Being imprisoned as a slave he had no free will. His master's mistress, Mrs. Auld, had started teaching him how to read. Now he was being able to have the same knowledge as them. Soon she stopped teaching him as her husband told her, "A n****r should know nothing but to obey his master-to do as he is told to do..."(Douglass 270). To overcome that struggle, Douglass started teaching himself instead. Learning was Douglass's way to be free. A way to be his own person. By being able to spell, read and write he was now the same as his master. That was his way of being free, having that knowledge. I feel for Douglass as I understand what it is like being a prisoner. With my depression most days are hard. I always feel tired and have hardly any motivation. By simply indulging in a book sometimes was a way for me to escape from my own depression.

Now as an adult, I am applying reading and writing to my daily life. I've come to understand that with reading I am able to obtain the knowledge I need to help lead me closer to hopefully becoming a nurse. Writing allows you to apply. It allows us to put down what we know and to express ourselves. I started this year off not so grand. My life was turning upside down on me fast. I was about to lose myself. I took the chance and enrolled into college hoping that this will make a difference with my depression. With the first step, I applied reading. I took the time to read what the school had to offer and what my choices were. Writing was applied when I took the initiative to fill the application for enrollment. With excitement I was accepted into Missouri Western. I was excited and terrified at the same time. I wasn't sure if I would be able to make it through school again. As I am a single mother of two handsome little boys and manic bipolar-depressed. I have more on my plate than most college students and I'm a decade older than most. However, here I am. I am applying myself just as Douglass applied himself to learn. He had to educate himself as it was not set fourth for slaves to have the knowledge to read or write. For me my depression is my prison. Going to college is my beginning to being set free. Everyday helps when I attend my classes. It helps me to clear my mind and focus on the main goal, getting my nursing degree. What people don't realize is that depression can be a very difficult thing to deal with. It can weigh you down and make daily life unbearable. You become basically a zombie were nothing else matters. My children have suffered from my depression. I'm trying to change that by going to college. Studies, reading, and writing are helping me to get out of the mind set that I have been stuck in since I could remember. Even though Douglass was a

slave, he pushed himself to learn to read and write. He did all he could to teach himself. He even was able to get the street kids to teach him. He wanted to be free like them. He would tell them, "You will be free soon as you are twenty-one, but I am a slave for life..." Their helping allowed him to have that knowledge of understanding the words and being able to read. He didn't have a pen or pencil like we use today. Instead he had a board fence, brick wall, and pavement that he would use for his notebook. For writing utensils he would use a piece of chalk. He learned the words by using a Webster's Spelling Book. All these things he used to apply to teach himself to read and write. It would help him feel free. Douglass expresses in his essay how he seen his situation, "The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. I could regard them in no other light than a band of successful robbers, who had left their homes, and gone to Africa, and stolen us from our homes, and in a strange land reduce us to slavery". Even with what was being held against him, he over came that and was able to teach himself. Being able to do this for himself as I am going to school for my self was a way for us each to overcome our struggles. I am pushing myself to learn so I can conquer my depression and try to be something better.

It's a choice wither or not you want something to impact your life. Wither you're pursuing a career by attending school or doing something you love, these are just some of the things that can be applied with reading and writing. Reading, "How I Learned How to Read and Write" by Fredrick Douglass you get an understanding of some of the struggles he faced being as a slave. Not being able to be your own person or have the simple gratification being able to read and write. That is something that a lot of us take for granted. Its not a chore. It's a skill to have. Reading and writing opens us up to new possibilities. Look what I am doing, I am attending college to pursue my nursing degree. There are many things to be available to use through reading and writing. We just have to be the ones to look for it. I encourage you to sit down and read a book or any piece of literature. Did you learn anything from it or even about yourself? What Douglass did for himself was amazing, to have nothing, to be nothing. He over came that and allowed for himself to be more. He took the initiative to make his life better, to give himself something he wanted. He wanted to learn to read and write and be equal. We can apply this life long skill and help ourselves in different ways. Rather it be for school purpose or for simple pleasure. Again it is ultimately up to us to make that choice or not. Reading and writing means more to me now than ever before. For me it is something that will help me be free from my depression.

Literacy; Different Worlds to Imagine

Annastazhya Lack

“All the power and knowledge that books contain at the fingertips of these stubborn children, at the fingertips of me. I finally realized that reading contained all these worlds, all these escape routes from reality, when my sixth-grade teacher put actual effort into teaching us about books. She wanted to change our class for the better.”

Literacy for me, means expressing my thoughts. When I write, my imagination takes over my mind and I express my thoughts and feelings that I want to share or simply transfer from my mind to the world. The worlds that writers create is their thoughts and feelings while we, the readers, interpret their words in our own perspective thoughts and we soon start to form our own imaginative opinions on the writer’s creations. I start thinking about a writer’s thoughts and feelings through their words, through their imagination. When I’m stuck inside my head and I can’t run away from the worlds I’m creating for myself, I cope by reading. Reading someone else’s ideas lets me escape my own world for a short time. To escape bad thoughts and to have a break from myself. Sherman Alexie, the writer of *“The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me”*, describes his story, his literacy journey. In this story of his, he states, “In all my years in the reservation school system, I was never taught how to write poetry, short stories, or novels... I cannot recall a single time that a guest teacher visited the reservation” (187). Alexie was not going to let a setback like this determine his journey’s outcome. From his devotion to love books, because of his father, Alexie started visiting schools to be the guest teacher that he never had growing up. The thing is, I never really found help through reading and didn’t even understand why it was so important to people, until my sixth-grade year. I had a teacher that was new to the state and she had realized she got the worst class in the school. She realized this and she wanted to make a change. She read our class a Sci-Fi book once a week. I fell in love with the book and re-read it that upcoming summer. Throughout my seventh and eighth-grade years I had finished the series. The books took me to a whole new level of understanding. Just like Richard Rodriguez who wrote the essay, *“The Lonely Good Company of Books”*, I had finally realized why people read. Rodriguez, like me, didn’t understand why people read for pleasure. He grew up with his parents only reading the newspaper, or things they had to read. Rodriguez didn’t get

the meaning of reading until his own teacher realized that he was failing in his reading class. His teacher sat him down in a quiet room while they took turns reading a book. Rodriguez found this very interesting and started to give books a chance. Rodriguez and I, as we got more into reading, we couldn't stop. For Rodriguez, he recalled the old nun, his teacher, stating, "I had nothing to fear. Didn't I realize that reading would open up whole new worlds? A book could open doors for me. It could introduce me to people and show me places I never imagined existed" (204). Rodriguez was still feeling unmotivated about reading, until it dawned on him that books were going to make him educated. He overcame his fear of the loneliness that came with reading by himself. Like Rodriguez, I wanted to imagine the other worlds people have created. I personally, wanted to escape my world. I wanted to explore writer's imaginations. I wanted to learn. I wanted to attain the knowledge that came from books.

In my past of growing up, I didn't have the motivation or encouragement others had towards reading. Like Alexie, my teachers didn't push me to my potential till my sixth-grade. The years growing up, the only books I saw were a scarce amount throughout my house. We had nothing that would catch my eyes, or books that I could pronounce, until one day my brother came home with a big box of thin, intensely colorful, superhero books. I used to enjoy looking through my brother's comic books, but soon got discouraged from reading altogether, when he took them away from me. Not because he was being greedy, but these comics were special to him. I envied him for cherishing the books, but I was also annoyed. I sat there wondering why my brother got to read these comics and I didn't. I was young at the time, so I just figured that reading was made for boys and I didn't have to worry about it in my future. Going throughout school till my sixth-grade, I was forced into reading books and I either chose to take a failing grade or cheat my way out of it. I was being stubborn because I didn't know what the value of reading was. I wondered why it was such a big deal to people. You could even say I was almost jealous of the people who read for enjoyment and pleasure. Rodriguez also grew up with his parents only reading when they had to, or when it was essential. Rodriguez explained, "Every time I had to read a book for an assignment, I felt like I was doing a chore". Rodriguez also did not know why reading was important. He found it nonvaluable and pointless. At the time, I also felt the same way about reading. I didn't attain any knowledge from these books and they did not interest me. I questioned if I was even learning anything. When Alexie was visiting schools to help teach kids to learn about reading, he stated, "I visit the schools as

often as possible. The Indian kids crowd the classroom. Many are writing their own poems, short stories and novels... They look at me with bright eyes and arrogant wonder... Then there are the sullen and already defeated Indian kids who sit in the back rows and ignore me with theatrical precision... They refuse and resist” (187). Alexie is trying to save the lives of kids that don’t know the value of books or the meaning to learn and read. All the power and knowledge that books contain at the fingertips of these stubborn children, at the fingertips of me. I finally realized that reading contained all these worlds, all these escape routes from reality, when my sixth-grade teacher put actual effort into teaching us about books. She wanted to change our class for the better. She wanted the best for her students, even if she had to read that silly Sci-Fi book once a week to us. I’ll never forget that day when my mind lit up with that so called, “Arrogant wonder”.

During the years experiencing my new way of learning, I couldn’t stop reading. Every book I found interesting, I would read it. I couldn’t keep my hands-off books. My fingertips finally reached their full potential after flipping through page, after pages of books. I enjoyed reading where ever it was, whether it was in the school bathroom during lunchtime, sitting in the empty stall, my only company being the book I was reading, or on the crowded noisy bus going home from school, and even simply when I woke up from a nightmare at 3:00am. I was always reading. I felt comfortable reading, like Rodriguez, we were in another world. We stayed in the reading world, our second world. Rodriguez states, “In spite of my earnestness, I found reading a pleasurable activity. I came to enjoy the lonely, good company of books... I’d feel a mysterious comfort” (204). When Rodriguez read, he felt comfort. He finally enjoyed the loneliness that came with reading books. The comfort I got from reading books was unreal. From looking at myself reading from an outside point of view, I’m alone. But to me, I was not alone. I was inside the readers mind, diving deeper into the emotions, deeper into the creativity, even deeper into the writer’s imagination.

Education and morals go hand in hand. For me I learned my morals, which is a big part of my own education through one special book. Throughout all the books I have read, “*The Bible*”, will always be one of my most favorite, and most hated books. The holy book is to me, a big, long, overdrawn book of life lessons. When I read any book, I always try to find the bigger picture. Try to learn and figure out what the writer wants to tell me. Rodriguez’s idea on the, “Bigger picture” of books is, “In sixth-grade I simply

concluded that what gave a book its value was some major idea or theme it contained... Rereading these brief moralistic appraisals usually left me disheartened. I couldn't believe that they were really the source of reading's value. But for many years, they constituted the only means I had of describing to myself the educational value of books" (204). From Rodriguez reading books, he figured out what the writer was trying to tell him. Rodriguez understood the bigger picture. It was his way of valuing what he was reading. The holy book is a prime example of the biggest picture. People might have their own imaginative opinions on it, but for me, it's a book of moralistic fairy-tails. I never found this way of thinking about, "The Bible", until I enjoyed reading books. I enjoyed going through all the stories in "The Bible" again when I fully understood books and trying to figure out the morals; what the book was trying to teach me.

When I'm reading, and I find the climax of the book, or even an emotionally intense part, I like to finish the paragraph that it's on and close my book to reimagine the scenario. I get high from the rush of emotions flowing through my mind after reading a good part in a book. Imagining it happen over, and over, and over again, so I have space in my head to ask myself questions. I answer back with guesses. I purposely try and spoil the book for myself, so I can keep on reading to find out what the truth is. What will really happen throughout the rest of the book or what the conclusion will turn out like. These feelings brought me back to when I was reading Rodriguez's story and his feelings on reading were very similar to mine, he explains:

I loved the feeling I got—after the first hundred pages—of being at home in a fictional world where I knew the names of the characters and cared about what was going to happen to them. And it bothered me that I was forced away at the conclusion, when the fiction closed tight, like a fortune-teller's fist—the futures of all the major characters neatly resolved. I never knew how to take such feelings seriously, however. Nor did I suspect that these experiences could be part of a novel's meaning (205).

Rodriguez follows this feeling of his with informing to us readers, that he still enjoys and has pleasure after reading books. Pleasure from the weight of all his books, carrying them back to the library, but most importantly, pleasure from the achievement of finishing a book, and assuring him that he can move onto another. After I finish a book, I feel completely devastated. I try and have happy thoughts on

the conclusion, but all my emotions pour out. I feel like a piece of me ended, one of my worlds I imagined, collapsed. I usually pick myself up after a few days of imagining what happens next, then I personally send the world I created from a book, a good farewell.

In the, "*Lonely Good Company of Book*", by Richard Rodriguez, Rodriguez and I both wish we could have read books earlier in life for pleasure. I am grateful I read books for enjoyment now, but If I could have read books for me to enjoy or attain knowledge before sixth grade, I would be farther in life than I am now. All the years I spent hating books and having no interest in them is my biggest regret in life. If I knew back then, what I can and have accomplished throughout the years of me being educated from books, I probably could have been a world renowned artist. In the present day, I read to attain knowledge on the writer's creation. To attain another world for my keeping and experiencing. Just like Sherman Alexie in "*The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me,*" I read to run away from my reality and open a chapter of new worlds to explore.

Literacy; The Ability to Read and Write

Titalia Long

“Reading is the key to knowledge. If you are able to read and write you are able to take control of your own life.”

As people grow older their ability to read and write advances. Today, we live in a world where many people are able to read and write. That was not always the case as shown in Frederick Douglass's essay “How I Learned to Read and Write” and affected his perception of literacy, On the contrary, Eudora Welty's essay “One Writer's Beginnings” explains how she grew up witnessing positive motivation and examples that led her to love reading. Apart from that, Richard Rodriguez grew up witnessing negative examples of literacy but learned to appreciate it. I, like Welty, grew up around positive examples of reading and writing, but grew to only use it for necessities like Rodriguez's parents, and now understand how lucky I am to have such advanced literacy as Douglass did.

Growing up in a home where your family appreciate books reflects how a child will grow to appreciate books. Eudora Welty became a great writer and a fan of books because her parents showed her the great company of books. Welty's parents grew up unable to afford books, so they made sure their child would have the opportunity to be surrounded by all types of books. So , starting young at the age of two Welty's mother would read her books on a regular basis. Welty stated, “My mother read to me. She'd read to me in the big bedroom in the mornings, when we were in her rocker together... She'd read to me in the dining room on winter afternoons in front of the coal fire” (206). Welty's mother showed Welty the appreciation and joy a book can bring by reading to her as a child. This same joy was carried by Welty as she grew into an adult. Similarly to Welty, I grew up with my mother reading to me as well. My mother would read me books like *No David* and *The Rainbow Fish* . As a child these books were exciting to me. I got to do two things I loved; spend time with my mother and read books. For me reading books were just like watching television only narrated by my mother. so when I went to school and story time came I pretended the little voice reading the words in my head was my mother's voice. Later on in middle school

my school became my motivation for reading. At the school I attended they would do things like give away a free Six Flags ticket to anyone who read 100 books over the summer. I always wanted that Six Flags ticket and so I would spend my summers reading as many books as i could. Never did I waste time on a book that I didn't like. I would set the book down and skip to the next to keep my interest in reading. My joy of reading started by my mother reading me books when I was little, but as I got older school took that joy away from me.

Living with a family who only read to benefit a need and not for pleasure has an impact on their children's reading capabilities. When Rodriguez was younger he didn't have a parent that cherished reading. His parents didn't read stories to him; neither did he ever see them reading for fun. Rodriguez's parent's only read when they needed to. Not when they wanted to. In Rodriguez's essay "The Lonely Good Company of Books" he explained, "For both my parents, however, reading was something done out of necessity and as quickly as possible. Never did I see either of them read an entire book. Their reading consisted of manuals, prayer books, newspapers, recipes"(203). There was no role model for Rodriguez to look up to in his house when it came to reading. So Rodriguez had to find motivation elsewhere. At school he would have a nun read to him every day. Eventually, Rodriguez found his love for reading but was afraid to read by himself. Before he knew it Rodriguez was already in high school and had read hundreds of books. Because of the many variety of books he read, reading led him to be academically successful. Although he was successful in school due to his love in reading, he was not a good reader. Unlike Rodriguez, My mother read to me as a child and I learned to love books. However, the older I got the more I was forced to read books rather than choosing to on my own. This lost my interest in reading. In high school I was told to read books about history. Some books I enjoyed , but most I did not because I was a fan of horror, comedy, drama, and fantasy, not nonfiction. I also was told to read plays like *Romeo and Juliet* which I did not understand. The more books I was told to read and didn't like the more of a drag it became to read anything else. Reading and writing are not always used for fun. It's used for business as well and at some point becomes a priority and not a choice. On the other hand, because of that knowing how to read and write can be taken for granted.

If literacy wasn't always available to this new generation then people would read more than they do now. Some people refuse to pick up and read a book or write a story not knowing what great privilege they

have in order to do so. In Frederick Douglass's essay "How I Learned to Read and Write" it was illegal for slaves to have the ability to read and write, leaving them illiterate. Imagine working for someone who takes advantage of you. For example, if your employer tells you that because you came into work late you have to work on your only day off, is this not illegal? But, you would have no idea because you cannot read. They tell you it is legal for them to mistreat you and you go on thinking what they are doing is okay. Reading is the key to knowledge. If you are able to read and write you are able to take control of your own life. Douglass's slave masters did not want this for Douglass. In fact, it was said, "Nothing seemed to make her more angry than to see me with a newspaper. She seemed to think that here lay danger. I have had her rush at me with a face made up of all fury, and snatch from me a newspaper,..." She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other" (190). Douglass's slave master was also his mistress. She used to be very kind to Douglass and would offer to teach him to read and write. Soon the mistress's husband got to her head and she began to think it was wrong for slaves to know how to read and write. She banned Douglass from ever picking up a book or newspaper and began to become cruel. Not being allowed to read and write made Douglass want to learn even more. Even though it was years until Douglass could read and write efficiently he let nothing stop him. When he was finally able to read and write a whole new world opened to him. He was informed on topics he never knew of and because of his ability to do so led him to escape to freedom. Unlike Douglass, it was legal for me to learn to read and write. People would tell me that I needed to read and write all the time and I would be made to do so. Having been forced to read and write made me not want. I stopped doing it for fun and only did it because I was told. I did not appreciate how much of a gift literacy is. I now understand by reading Douglass's work that if I were unable to read and write my life could be controlled by someone else. I would be taken advantage of and ignorant because I didn't know. When I got to college I started to have more respect for my literacy. I was thankful to be able to read and write at a level I am now. Remembering when I dreaded picking up a book makes me feel like a privileged brat who didn't know any better. Now I do understand how important my literacy is.

My journey of literacy was truly important to take. If I were not put into this journey I wouldn't understand the great treasure that being able to be literate gives us. It is important to show and teach children when they are young how to value books. Not only how to value books, but how to gain something

from every book or writing that you read regardless of if it's non fiction. Knowing the history of literacy affects how a person can value their literacy as well. Words are powerful and both writing and reading need to be taken advantage of in every way possible because without them we are slaves to ignorance.

The Dominance of Reading

Andrew Wright

“Even though a large number of books went unread during the duration of my high school life, I still understood the importance of knowing how to read and what it means to read. Reading and understanding what is read is important and powerful.”

“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you’ll go.” This quote from Dr. Seuss shares with us the importance of reading. Reading can expand the never ending wonders that awaken in the mind, as reading is knowledge and knowledge is power. In the short autobiography “One Writer’s Beginnings,” Eudora Welty, an American short story writer and novelist, explains in great detail her journey growing up and becoming a writer. Even though we differ in respect to how much we read in terms of books, Welty and I are similar in the way we began to read books, and our views of the importance of reading.

Ever since I can remember reading has been part of my life. Between the ages of two and five my mother read to me, then once I was old enough I began to read short stories to her that I picked from my elementary school library. Both Welty and I have been comforted by the soothing sound of our mothers’ voices as they brought life to the words on the pages. Welty explains, “My mother read to me. She’d read to me on the big bedroom in the mornings, when we were in her rocker together”(206). The stories my mother read to me were fun such as the *Berenstain Bears* or *No, David!* I remember times she would have me try and read even before I could write my name, which must have been the teacher in her. As I grew older the reading changed and I would read to my mother before I went to bed. I did not hate or love reading at this age. As much as reading and literature would be a part of school while I became older, and words were all around the natural world, I grasped to understand reading was a task I had to master if I wanted to be successful in the real world. Reading at a young age was exploratory for both Welty and I and the idea of reading was fun and interesting, by virtue of our mothers will to teach us.

As I progressed into an independent reader, I became less of a book reader. I still read some short stories about either running or ones I came across that were interesting to me. I recognized that the more

one reads the more knowledge one could obtain. Reading books for me became an idea of the past as technology became more prominent, and any information I needed was at the tips of my fingers. The need for books developed into wasted labor. My mother never forced me to keep reading books, as my reading scores were never below average; she knew I had dissatisfaction for books and sitting still for too long. On the report cards my mother would get, the teacher would write along the lines of “excellent student, but is a social butterfly”. My mother would never complain much about these comments, just a scold and a pat on the hand, and we would go about our day. In my later pre-teen years, I felt more inclined to focus on reality and not fictional stories. I wanted to enjoy exploring on my own and not from pages of a book. I always became bored with small affairs, even when sitting watching television, therefore how could I ever sit and read a book? Looking back, I cannot recall a specific event, or time in my life to which made me view life this way; I just looked at life black and white. I did not have an aversion to fictional stories, I just never gravitated towards them. Crafting, art, playing with toys and going outside were what I truly loved when I was younger.

Welty fell in love with reading books, differing from what I did, and found beauty in the words she read. Welty was handed down books from her parents, also receiving new books as presents on Christmas. Welty states, “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 came from, I cannot remember a time when I was not in love with them”(206). Welty’s love for books expanded greatly, incorporating her knowledge from reading into her school life and becoming an author winning awards for her writing. Instead of a love for books I fell in love with sports as I grew older. I enjoyed the physical exertion of running during my freshman year, which took up most of my time outside of school, and having a job. Consequently, throughout my high school life books were not a top priority. I only read what was required, barely, but I did enjoy writing and creating stories about my life, but this was not until my third year of highschool. I was still expanding my knowledge through reading articles, tutorials, and blogs; or, watching videos of such information regarding different muscle groups and how to stretch them, with the point of being a runner who placed much stress on my body. As Welty’s love for books flourished mine plummeted. Going to the library was now a waste of time for me as I would grab a book that would sit in my locker. I found more joy in returning an untouched book than picking one out because then I did not have to worry about it taking up space anymore.

Even though a large number of books went unread during the duration of my high school life, I still understood the importance of knowing how to read and what it means to read. Reading and understanding what is read is important and powerful. Welty and I agree on the importance of reading as being truthful. Welty writes, “I have to suppose, but never found out, that this is the case with all readers-to read as listeners-and with all writers, to write as listeners. It may be part of the desire to write. The sound of what falls on the page begins the process of testing it for truth, for me. Whether I am right to trust so far I don’t know”(209). In today’s world false information is ever growing, even in books, words have no value; the value words hold is in truth behind them. Knowing how to read is compelling and reading and understanding the truth is even more dynamic. Thinking independently and reading multiple sources is a key to knowledge and understanding. Reading can be used in a negative way when it comes to information uses for fear mongering and propaganda, but reading can also be wonderful for storytelling and exploring new worlds. Reading can be full of imagination, help us understand what it is like being another person’s shoes and escaping our own reality.

Reading serves more than the purpose of written words on a page, and magical stories. The underlying truth of reading is understanding. Welty and I may differ on the amount of books a person should read and our contrasting love for books, but we both agree on the importance of reading and knowing the truth. I don’t blame technology as a downfall, but more as a new way of learning. As most of this world, reading can be organic, ever changing, and generations will adapt leaving old ways behind. Reading should never stop because if we stop reading then we stop going places and expanding the mind.

About the Authors

In the words of the
students' English
100 instructors

Travel is to make a journey or to have an adventure to somewhere by bicycle, train, airplane, car, motorcycle, or boat. It could be an exploration to somewhere new planned or unplanned to meet new people, new things and new places. There are different types of adventures waiting for you to explore.

There are lots of places to explore. Places could be urban or suburban. Some people loves to be with nature to free their minds and refresh their souls, but some like to be in the city. You will get lots of benefits such as exploring new culture.



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



Ernest Hemingway

Tia Booker: Tia seemed quiet when I first met her in my class, but she always had something interesting to say in her essays. Not only that, but she was always eager to revise and improve her own writing whenever possible. I met with Tia multiple times throughout the semester, before, during, and after class, to talk about her writing and ways she could be clearer with her ideas. The essay in this book, “Do Better,” is one of her best, and most meaningful pieces she wrote in my class. Tia interviewed her mother and learned more about her mom’s childhood, as well as how hard she worked and hustled to make a better life for herself and for her children. By reading this essay, you understand the kind of person who raised Tia, and you see why she is such a bright, hard working woman herself. I was lucky to have Tia as a student during one of my first semesters as an instructor, and anyone who has her in future will have the privilege of working with her and seeing her ideas grow within her writing. –Alyssa Striplin

Terry Butler: Terry Butler in his essay “My Father’s House” gives the reader a wonderful example of turning disadvantage into an opportunity for growth and his own independence. Through Terry’s expressive descriptions, we see his father’s craft and ability in building beautiful homes for the wealthy, and then we vividly see his own home in disrepair through Terry’s lighthearted and amusing descriptions. He writes, “The only way to open the screen door at my father’s house is brute force. I mean, a person has to yank the door like they’re saving the world.” He gives more description of the process and then he writes, “Once I opened the door, I learned the specific keys to life.” Then he writes about the life skills he learned in this house. Rather than blaming or complaining, Terry shows the reader how he and his family worked together to survive adverse situations and how this hard work strengthened the bond among them. The reader admires Terry and his family for their unique ability to conquer, through hard work and love for one another, the difficult circumstances which befell them. This piece shows the epitome of the

love of family from which we can all benefit. I loved reading this essay, and I know you will too. Read it and enjoy! -Patricia Brost

Kassidy Courter: Kassidy Courter shows her writing expertise in two essays, “The New Normal” and “The Power in Trust.” In “The New Normal” Kassidy interviews a young wife and mother whose law enforcement husband passed away after a tragic traffic accident while on duty. In this interview Cassidy writes with compassion about the strength and resilience this young widow shows in coping with her loss and raising her young son. In “The Power of Trust” Kassidy compares her experiences in reading and writing to Russell Baker’s essay “Learning to Write” and Eudora Welty’s essay “One Writer’s Beginnings.” Kassidy says “My experiences are a lot like Welty and Baker. One thing I took from both of them is to trust myself. For Baker he had to learn to trust in an informal essay. Welty had to trust the voice in her head that she heard often while reading.” I loved reading Cassidy’s essays and I believe her words when she says, “Writing leads to reading as reading can lead to writing.” -Patricia Brost

Audrey Edwards: Audrey is a story-teller. She has a keen eye for detail and this is illustrated in her essay, “My Special Place.” In her essay, she writes, “Winter in Baltimore was like stepping into Narnia. Every tree in the neighborhood would be covered in ice and snow, making them look like glass sculptures that should have been put in a palace. Everything was silent, like the world had simply gone to sleep for just a little bit.” She brings to life her childhood in Baltimore and presents it to the reader as a magical, almost fairy tale-like place which allows the reader to understand that this is truly a special place to her. –Dawn Terrick

Chey Gericke: From the first day in class, Chey proved to the entire class that she was not afraid to speak her mind. I loved it because her insights and her life experiences were relevant to our course material and were important for her to share -- important for both her and her classmates. Chey was in class every day, willing to write and revise, write and revise, open to my feedback and eager to ask questions. In her published essay, she writes of her struggles as a young woman, with two beautiful boys, who is returning to college. Chey writes, “My life was turning upside down on me fast. I was about to lose

myself. I took the chance and enrolled in college hoping that this will make a difference with my depression . . . For me, my depression is my prison. Going to college is my beginning to being set free.” She is honest about her life and the obstacles she faces but she perseveres because she knows that education is key to her success, her empowerment and her freedom. This is a fact that I wish all of my students could understand and act upon. She is an inspiration to all students and should be a model for any student who questions his or her place in college. –Dawn Terrick

Bailey Gilbert: Bailey is the sort of student who brightens the room, mostly because of her infectious smile and positive outlook during class discussions. In her writing, though, Bailey grapples with overcoming abuse and literally running from that pain on the track field. In her first paper for this publication, “The Place That Has My Heart,” she explains, “I wanted to win state so bad that I didn’t have time to focus on all of the fighting happening back at home. I had to completely block all of it out, and worry about what I needed to get done in order to win. It was tough to achieve, but every day I was at the track, I was reminded of how bad I wanted it and that I had no control on what was happening back at home, which motivated me to perform to my best ability during my events.” In her second publication selection, Bailey segues neatly into an interview paper with her track coach who also found solace on the field despite difficult circumstances. Watching her progress as a writer was thrilling for me, but most inspiring is her grit and positivity as she races past any obstacles that might dare try to block her path. –Brooksie Kluge

Tiah Hines: In English 100, students are given articles and resources to write one of their first text-based essays. For Tiah, this wasn’t enough. She wanted to explore the issues with affording tuition at the college level in more depth than the assigned readings allowed. She ended up asking me permission to do more reading and research for her essay, which appears in this book, and that should be further proof that Tiah herself is an incredibly bright young woman with an interest in learning. Her essay, “College Tuition is Too Expensive,” is a well-organized look at the problems pricey tuition create for students like her, and ends up being a great argument for a major problem in education. Tiah’s work in this essay, and her work in my class, reinforced my own belief that students are the key to improving educational standards, and

that they know a lot more than most would give them credit for. I am proud to have been her teacher, and I hope she continues to grow as a student and as an intelligent woman in future. –Alyssa Striplin

Yolande Kalenda: Yolanda Kalenda in “My Grandparents’ House” takes us to her childhood home in Africa where we experience through her unique voice her family’s tradition of teaching the children. Yolanda tells about her first experience of visiting her grandparents’ home, playing Jeu de so’ with her many cousins, learning to cook fufu, and hearing stories about her culture. Yolanda says, “Being African is not all about being born in Africa but knowing what it represents and stands for. I’m an African who knows how to cook and knows my heritage. I enjoyed learning about Yolanda’s family and the history of her parents. Her descriptions of her grandparents’ house and kitchen enriched my knowledge. The lessons she learned from her grandparents about keeping the family united and passing on family stories to the younger children resonated with me. Yolanda says, “...my family tradition will keep on growing because I will tell my children who will tell my children’s children my story.” I believe heartily in Yolanda’s wisdom. I hope you will read her story and take it to heart as well. -Patricia Brost

Annastazhya Lack: Annastazhya surprised me throughout the semester whether it was with a different color of hair each week or with an insightful glimpse into an author like Sherman Alexie or into the book, *The Other Wes Moore*. She was shy and, oftentimes, would silently sit in class. But do not let her silence fool you. She is a bright young woman who is always deep in thought and can easily get lost in those thoughts. She can lose herself in writing about the place she loves the most, Eureka California, or in reading a book. She explains this as she writes in her essay, “Literacy: Different Worlds to Imagine, “After I finish a book, I feel completely devastated. I try and have happy thoughts on the conclusion, but all my emotions pour out. I feel like a piece of me ended, one of my worlds I imagined, collapsed.” As I read her words, I thought she was speaking directly to me for this is how I feel as well. Furthermore, this is the intellectual curiosity that every teacher loves. I know that sometimes, during the semester, writing was a struggle for her but as her two published essays show, the struggle was worth it. I look forward to her future writings. –Dawn Terrick

Daphne Latcher: Daphne Latcher is one of the best, albeit reluctant, writers to come through my classroom during my career as an educator. I recall one conversation early in the semester when Daphne and I discussed writing about a topic from her honest opinion, rather than focusing on what she thought the expected response should be. From that point on, Daphne’s voice was strong and clear on each essay the class wrote. Once she discovered she could write about her opinion and format her argument into structured essays, there was no stopping her. I encourage her to continue to pursue her passion and develop her voice in all of her future writing endeavors. – Beth Reinert

Titalia Long: Titalia Long, a talented writer and perceptive thinker, has written three important essays which are included in this publication. Her essay, “Room in the Basement” tackles the difficult topic of the sexual abuse of a vulnerable young girl. With brutal honesty Titalia describes her devastating experience and explains how she dealt with the aftermath of the event and how she used it to become stronger and to become an advocate for her younger siblings. She writes, “I became a more protective big sister to my siblings and developed an even stronger love for children. I want to teach and help younger people create a voice. I will help them to grow to be strong and smart. Hopefully, they will not have to experience what I had been through. I decided I was not going to let that one man in that one room define who I am.” Titalia’s story is an important one for all of us to become more aware. I thank her for having the courage to share her experience with her readers. In her essay “The Last Christmas” Titalia writes about teenage pregnancy. She interviews her sister and skillfully interweaves her sister’s words with her own in a revealing portrayal of a teenager who finds the strength to manage pregnancy, and then a child, while still a child herself. Titalia learns from her sister’s story about the power of motivation to overcoming obstacles. She writes, “Not only did Jasmin have family to support her but she also had the right state of mind. When Jasmin is feeling frustrated she takes a second to think about what’s really important.” Then Titalia sums up what she learned from her interview with her sister. She writes, “Being a teenage mom is not easy. It has its struggles but Jasmin overcame them. At the end of my interview I learned not to make excuses. As long as I am able to stay motivated I can do anything.” In truth, Titalia is very motivated. I believe her when she says she can do anything. Titalia’s essay “Literacy: The Ability to Read and Write” compares her experiences with reading and writing to those of three authors, Frederick Douglass, Eudora Welty, and Richard Rodriguez. She gives the example of Eudora Welty becoming a

writer and a lover of books because her parents encouraged her by surrounding her with books. Like Welty, Titalia had her mother to read to her and nurture her love of reading. She writes, “I got to do two things I loved; spend time with my mother and read books. For me reading books were just like watching television only narrated by my mother.” Later, however, she lost that joy of reading that her mother instilled in her. Here she contrasts her experience to Rodriguez’s experience in his essay “The Lonely Good Company of Books.” Titalia describes how she was expected to read specific books instead of those in her interest area. This dulled her desire for reading. She writes, “The more books I was told to read and didn’t like the more of a drag it became to read anything else.” Then Titalia explores Frederick Douglass’ quest for literacy as being the catalyst for freedom. She writes, “I did not appreciate how much of a gift literacy is. I now understand by reading Douglass’s work that if I were unable to read and write my life could be controlled by someone else. I would be taken advantage of and ignorant because I didn’t know. When I got to college I started to have more respect for my literacy. I was thankful to be able to read and write at a level I am now. Remembering when I dreaded picking up a book makes me feel like a privileged brat who didn’t know any better. Now I do understand how important my literacy is.” Titalia’s essay is powerful in its truth about literacy. -Patricia Brost

Katelynn Meyer: Katelynn Meyer in her essay “Finger Lickin’ Good” shows the reader what it’s like to work in a fast food environment. With vivid, staccato descriptions Katelynn takes us behind the counter and lets us experience her hectic, but memorable first job that taught her life lessons that she will always value. She says, “This job taught me more than I have ever learned in school. Not only did this job teach me how to cope with stress, how to prioritize my time and tasks, and how to work as a team to be successful, but this job showed me how to be a successful worker in the real world.” These are valuable life lessons we can all learn from. Read this.

-Patricia Brost

Marianne Prost: Does Marianne have a fan club? If so, I’d like to be President. Her papers were always some of my favorites, and her publication piece, “La Surdouée,” is no exception. In this essay, Marianne describes walking around her French hometown in a black tutu (“Carrie Bradshaw style”), standing out, feeling too tall and too pale. She writes, “I know the town, I knew the town, but I was never made to be a

permanent feature of it.” Perhaps she stood out in my classroom, too, as a fabulously dressed French student oozing with creativity, but I can’t imagine that class without her. Wherever she ends up--wherever she decides to become a “permanent feature”--I hope she continues writing, and I know she’ll find a new fan club. –Brooksie Kluge

Jillian Rumpf: Jillian has that rare ability to paint a picture in her readers’ minds. In the publication piece, “The Farm That Changes My Life,” she composes an image of muddy kids in dirty boots and “oversized overalls” jumping from the water pipe into a local creek. The descriptions are vivid and pull me into a space I’d like to inhabit. Sitting in my cold office, I am able to read her words and imagine I am somewhere else entirely with her, chasing cats, constructing treehouses, and building a fire with “black smoke [rising] above the trees.” I selfishly hope she continues writing--not just because she’s gifted--but because I’d like to leave this cold office and go live in her world just a bit more. –Brooksie Kluge

Gabby Rustici: One of the best aspects of being a writing instructor is working with students who are willing to take risks to improve their writing. While writing each essay did not come easily for Gabby, she worked diligently all semester to pursue interesting topics and revise each paper until she was satisfied with her work. The lessons learned in perseverance and persistence will continue to serve her well in her experiences beyond the classroom. I truly enjoyed watching Gabby grow as a student and as a person this semester; I wish her all the best. – Beth Reinert

Dre'Shaun Sanders: I believe this current generation of college students will probably be the most important generation in America’s history--they are facing nearly insurmountable obstacles and confront challenges that most can’t begin to understand. I breathe a little easier knowing that Dre'Shaun Sanders is part of this incredibly important generation. In his publication piece, “Education: Effect on Minorities,” Dre'Shaun confronts the injustice minority students face in academia. He points out, “We [black students] are taught things [in public school] that we can’t relate to, we are told to do things a certain way and we are penalized if we don’t meet the standards, how is this not a training ground set up for us to fail?” He’s right, of course, and I hope his voice continues to guide his generation as they fight against injustice.

-Brooksie Kluge

Ella Sonderegger: Ella is a talented writer who creates a strong presence on the page so there is no doubt about who she is and what she believes. All of her essays in this publication reveal a piece of her life: her struggles, her victories, her identity. And that is what a good writer does. For her award winning essay, "10 x 12," she bares her soul and in doing so empowers those who have faced the demons she has. I remember after we read Dorothy Allison's essay, "Place," a professional reading I assigned with the hope to get students critically thinking about the significant place they wanted to write about, Ella came up to me after class to tell me that she had changed her mind about the place she wanted to write about and showed me a draft of this paper. I was speechless. Yes, the topic was haunting, but the writing was just as haunting, just as powerful. Her opening lines, "Evil can come in different shapes and sizes. For some it was a cracked closet door, the slightly open curtains peeping out into the dark night, or the fear of the monster under the bed. Mine was the room in the basement and the thirteen year old boy that slept in it," grabbed me and never let go. She begins to tell her story with the description "the purple-blue fluorescent light from the lava lamp is always lit in the back of my mind and my body still curls together into its own turtle shell way," but ends her story by proving to the reader she has grown strong, "My moments were no longer secrets and I was no longer afraid of the dark, purple-blue fluorescent truths. Like any other young adult, I had to face the truth behind my fears and manipulate them in order to survive." Evocative. Meaningful. Cohesive. I was afraid to move the words on the page. But I was proud of Ella as she made this commitment to share and write about this event in her life as a real writer, to open herself up to the pain and the glory of revising her life story so that it could be the most effective and moving essay for both herself and her readers. Whatever she decides to do in life, I truly hope she continues to write -- it would be a shame if she did not use her passionate and purposeful writing to help herself and others. –Dawn Terrick

Myranda Swearingen: Myranda has a knack for bringing the reader along with her in her writing journey. In "From Struggles to Success: The Life of a Young Bride and Mother," Myranda does just that, allowing us to smell the "coffee and handmade tortillas" in her grandmother's kitchen as the women sit around the table, "reminiscing about the past and looking ahead to the future." As the essay unfolds,

Myranda takes us along on her grandmother's journey as an impossibly young bride, a determined single mother, and a loving grandmother. Myranda's writing is honest, poignant, reflective, and deeply appreciative of family and culture. –Amy Miller

Araimani Wade: Araimani's creativity and thoughtfulness seeps into every writing assignment, including smaller, in-class tasks, but it is especially present in her publication piece, "Sweet Serenity." In this paper, she describes a place that she visits to "get away from everything": The St. Louis Arch, Riverfront. Not only is she skilled at describing the physical world around her, but she has the ability to make readers feel the depth of her emotions. Araimani's writing is special because it is so raw and so real, and I hope she continues to share her gift with the world. –Brooksie Kluge

Andrew Wright: In "The Dominance of Reading," Andrew writes, "I found more joy in returning an untouched book than picking one out because then I did not have to worry about it taking up space anymore." When I first read that line, the weight of its honesty stayed with me, and even though I adore the "magical stories" in books, I also came to appreciate Andrew's perspective that one doesn't have to love to read to understand its importance. That is what good writing does; as Andrew says, "The value words hold is the truth behind them" and "if we stop reading then we stop going places and expanding the mind." Andrew's words expanded my mind. –Amy Miller