Personal Mission Essay:

The Golden Lacquer

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Growing up, it seemed my dad was always working. He took on overtime whenever it was offered and rarely missed work. Even when the snow was waist deep, he tried, unsuccessfully I might add, to dislodge his little Chevy S10 from our driveway in an attempt to get to work. Over the years, he has continually taught me the value of honesty and hard work. His determination to provide for his family meant that he sacrificed a great many things over the years to allow us to have more robust opportunities. Having a child has changed me in ways that I never could have imagined possible and I am finally understanding how it was so easy for my dad to make those sacrifices. It came as no surprise to me when we discussed our centers in week 5, that I identified strongly with having a family center according to Covey (O’Connell, 2014). A similar desire to my dad’s to provide and protect is what drives me to do the same for my daughter and ultimately is the reason that I have returned to college to complete my Bachelor’s degree. While that statement seems so simple typed out on the page, there are infinite layers of respect and understanding that I want to teach her, and that all begins with me and what I am willing to do to improve myself. Her mere existence inspires me to be a better person. For her, I have begun a journey that will hopefully provide a more solid future for us, financially, allowing greater opportunities. Lessons learned throughout this semester have given me tools and resources to make sure I can successfully accomplish the personal growth I am seeking inside of the classroom as well as in everyday life.

Beginning this semester, my original intent on selecting Lit (Karr, 2009) for my pre-class read was only because the summary sounded like one I would be interested in. I am not much of a book reader, especially non-fiction as it is difficult for me to get into the story. However, I found many parallels between our lives as I made my way through Karr’s memoir. Much like the addiction that Mary Karr had succumbed to with alcohol, I was enslaved to the idea of love. Addicted to a man that feigned all aspects of life, I began to realize that my marriage had been riding blindly on excuses that I continued to make for him. His behaviors were out of control and I had allowed it to progress, creating a dangerous environment for my daughter and myself. I needed to make a safe place for her and I, no matter the cost, and I knew at that point, life was going to become incredibly difficult. I had permitted my husband to strip me of all that I ever had during our marriage, including my self confidence, but I was not going to allow him to do the same to my daughter. For her, I needed to be brave enough to create an exit strategy and follow through. Just as Karr constantly struggled to come to terms with getting help with her alcoholism, seeking help has never been easy for me either. In this case it was even harder because that meant admitting all of the things I had once tried to cover up about our family life hiding in the darkness.

Last semester was my first semester at Siena Heights and it was a minor disaster. The course was not well organized and it was a guessing game to figure out where assignment instructions were placed. Because of this, I failed to submit the first few assignments per the requirements, causing an immense amount of stress. I had always been a good student in previous academic ventures, organized and on top of my game, so these incidents had me questioning my ability to manage single motherhood, a full-time job *and* school. My boss even questioned whether returning to school was the right thing for me right now. Without hesitation, I responded “If not now, when?” It was then that I realized that there is never going to be a *good* time to make this happen for us, only a more optimal time, if I am so lucky. Moments like this highlight the reason it is so important to have a clear goal in mind, something we focused on our first week within this course when we discussed SMART planning (Dunne, 2009). Had I just enrolled for classes without a clear vision, I may have been tempted to agree with my boss. I am a planner by nature and I feel that my life is much smoother when I can expect things ahead of time. I have never made practice of writing out goals I may set for myself, regardless of having a good understanding of what it is I want to get from them. It was difficult at first, to have to envision *when* certain events should occur but once I was able to embrace the idea that writing a milestone down did not necessarily mean they were etched in concrete, I felt more confident in the process. I have even taken this lesson one step farther and printed out which classes I will need to complete my Bachelor’s degree. I have placed the printout in the front of my binder, a reminder and a visual roadmap of my challenge, allowing great satisfaction to cross off classes as I complete them.

Learning about andragogy was encouraging. As an adult learner, there are many qualities I can bring into the learning environment that I may have been missing out on in my earlier education. Graduating high school almost twenty years ago, I received a full scholarship to complete my Associate’s degree; at that time that was my end goal. I did not have a specific draw to any one niche over another, leading me to take the classes I had been told to take to obtain a degree. Being young and single, I was more willing to accept that I did not have my life planned out, keeping faith that it would happen some day. That mindset varies greatly from my approach this time around as I look to apply every one of the 6 principles Farina mentions in the Adult Learning Theory presentation (Farina, 2015). Being a single working mom, efficiency is a cornerstone to my existence. I have had many years of experience, mainly finding out what I *do not* want in life, that I can bring into learning as well as a career I am able to relate lessons to. Events that have occurred in my life help me to digest what I am being taught at a higher level, aiding in critical thinking, a skill that no doubt will be beneficial to all areas of my future.

Critical thinking has been highly emphasized throughout this course. Although it is a skill that I feel I practiced prior, this course pushed the boundaries beyond what my original understanding of critical thinking was. Examining different types of logical fallacies began to spark many questions. In today’s world of clickbait “fake news” on social media that most of us are exposed to daily, it is becoming harder and harder to decipher what information is *real*. It is important to consider the source, ask questions (lots of questions), research the topic and really dig in to where the information is coming from to determine the quality of the source. I do not feel it is a skill that is taught very well before college and even when we were able to laugh a little at Joey and his post hoc fallacy towards Rachel (DoktorScott, 2009), I am thankful that this was a covered topic in this course.

Most importantly, this course has allowed acceptance on many different levels; acceptance of myself by myself, along with acceptance of others’ opinions and outlooks on life. It was amazing to see how blended our class truly was. Each week the discussions provided vast amount of views which allowed me to expand my original thoughts on the pieces presented. There were points that other students made that I did not fully agree with, as well as they with mine, yet everyone was respectful and insightful in their responses. A true demonstration of pluralism according to our lesson, “Pluralism is *based on dialogue...*Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table — with one’s commitments.” (Eck, 2006).

At the end of the day, I reflect on what the past couple of years has taught me and how I can combine that with my learning at Siena Heights. Although it has presented the most difficult obstacles and has tested every understanding I have gained throughout life, I have learned positivity is key; one of many of my personal paradigm shifts. My attitude and how I approach a situation will greatly determine what I am able to accomplish. The only way to drown in a shallow puddle is to stay there, face down. My will and desire refused to leave me in that puddle. I knew that this life was no longer about me the day “Pregnant” appeared on the tiny digital window of the pregnancy test. No matter the walls that have been built in my way, I now have a young child that I need to make an example for. Her future starts with me picking myself up from that muddied puddle and marching on to greater opportunities. Life is a funny thing. It is never a linear journey, so much so that not many of us end up where we thought we would be. There are twists and turns and huge bumps that can throw us off of our intended course. It is how we evolve to the situations that make us the people we are today and who we can become for our future. Just like the Japanese tea bowl repaired with gold lacquer that Julie Burstein presents from the Freer Gallery (Burstein, 2012), I have been broken but in my determination, I have begun to repair my cracks with the knowledge and acceptance around me, emerging more beautiful than before. I want my daughter to be able to see those cracks, ask about those cracks and learn about those cracks. When she is able to understand how those cracks were repaired, I will find my peace, knowing that she can finally see in me, what I was able to see in my dad after all of these years.

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