

[student name]

[instructor name]

[class]

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Writer's Evolution Essay

In eighth grade, I had an English teacher named Mrs. ***. At my middle school, there were two honors English classes in the eighth grade, sixth hour with Mrs. *** and seventh hour with Mr. ***. At the time, this was a bitter divide. In Mrs. *** class we learned how to write an effective thesis statement, practiced picking appropriate transition words and perfected the 5 paragraph argumentative essay. In Mr. ***'s class, where most of my friends resided, they complained anytime a lesson was presented, generally refused to do any work and somehow convinced him to let them play silent ball during just about every class.

So as my buddies were raising hell down the hall, 45 minutes earlier I was writing about Anne Frank or learning how to present a counter-argument. I worked hard all year (this was before anyone bothered to tell me that middle school grades have no effect on your future, whatsoever) and ended up with an A- in Mrs. ***' course. On the last day of class when the bell rang, she pulled me aside as everyone else left the classroom.

"Have you ever watched David Letterman?" she asked me.

"Yeah, I've seen his show before," I responded, confused as to where this could be going.

“Good. I want you to write me a list of the top 10 reasons why you deserve an A in this class instead of an A-,” she said.

I left excited for the challenge. I didn’t understand why, but it was an energizing assignment. I had a strange sense of confidence, knowing that if she asked for this list, she wanted to hear what I had to say. She thought it’d be entertaining.

Looking back, this is the first time I ever remember being excited to write for an audience. I ended up getting the A, and part of me knew that she’d most likely give me the higher grade no matter what I wrote. But I took the task so seriously. I wanted to make her laugh, but also make good arguments. I wanted to expand on the things she knew about me and I wanted her to learn more. I had so many ideas and only ten sentences to make an impact. I wrote a clever list. It was witty for an eighth grader while remaining persuasive. Somehow, I knew that, I knew that my friends and my peers probably wouldn’t have written the same type of list. I knew that she picked me for some reason.

One of the lines I remember writing was, “Because you know my sister *** and you know my brother *** and so you know that the *** family does not know what an A- on a report card is.” Mrs. *** had both my older siblings and she knew who I was on the first day of class before I even walked in the door.

My parents thought the list was funny and took it to my next family party. I tried to pretend like I didn’t want the to pass it around to my aunts and uncles but secretly, I loved it. I loved to hear their laughs and see their smiles. I loved that they understood exactly what I was trying to get across. No one else in my family was

having their writing shown to others. This was something I realized I was good at and it was something that made me different.

Since that moment, I have craved the connection I could create with others through my writing. Shortly after, in my freshman year of high school, as I explained in depth in my “Why I Write” essay, I started to realize that I could define myself as a writer. Before, I had always focused on basketball, but when *** moved into my town and played for my high school team, that definition didn’t seem to fit anymore. With her leadership and excellent play, we won a state championship. She received many accolades throughout the state of Michigan for her play and eventually went on to sign with the University of Notre Dame. *** helped me realize that there could be something out there that I could be just as talented at, but basketball was not it. In the back of my mind there was always some type of pressure to be the best and perform in basketball. I worried too much about if I would live up to the expectations or if I could be as good as my older sister.

“Writing never felt that way. I embraced the challenge of obsessing over drafts, finding that exact word to explain a situation and the hard work that accompanied producing prose that I was truly proud to put my name on. The work never felt like work. Any time my teacher tried to assign me a hard hitting, investigative piece, I did everything I could to get out of it. I didn’t care about informative journalism. I didn’t want to keep my own voice out of my writing. I wanted the freedom to put words on a page that could scream at a reader or whisper to them. I wanted the opportunity express appreciation or

sadness. I wanted to holistically explain an emotion or an experience and find commonality with others through those moments.” (Sidney, “Why I Write”).

So to this day, as a writer, I strive for that connection. I’ve found that writing makes me feel less alone. When others can read the words that come from my own head and my own heart on a page and understand them, it’s an indescribable feeling. It’s a high that I cannot replace and will always fight for. Mrs. *** was the first person to introduce this feeling to me and throughout high school writing, and being received as a writer, was one of the main parts of who I was.

During my time at the University of Michigan, this desire has not changed, but my approach had to change drastically. In high school when I wrote our graduation speech or columns in our school newspaper, it was easy. Everyone knew who I was, everyone knew who my family was. Mrs. *** knew I was a *** child and that gave her preconceived notions about my intelligence and background. I was connecting with people with which I was already connected. It was an opportunity for people that knew me to get to know me better, but at Michigan I’ve had to learn how to connect with readers who do not know me at all. No one in Ann Arbor knew who the *** family was and more importantly, no one cared.

Strangely enough, I slowly learned this lesson through my academic writing at Michigan. When I came here freshman year, I would frequently receive feedback in my classes that my papers needed to be more specific. I was taking on too much for the amount of pages allotted. Many times my professors or GSIs would circle a sentence and mark in the margin, “this could be its own paragraph,” or “develop this idea, what do you mean?” I was taking complex arguments or ideas and not giving

them the amount of space they deserved to be explained fully. I would mention them, assuming my reader understood where I was coming from and how it would fit into my overall message. But I was not connected with these readers the way that I was used to being connected with my audiences in high school. Before, I was writing for those that knew me best. I had to learn how to write for those who barely knew me at all by working harder to be specific without being repetitious.

It took practice and a lot of red writing in the margins, but I started to get a hang of this specificity in my academic writing. *What is my argument here? Does this sentence support that argument? Is this idea fully developed for my reader? This sentence seems too off topic? Cut it.* I started to have these conversations with myself as I prepared drafts and eventually I started to produce highly persuasive academic papers. It was good for my ego and my GPA, but this wasn't the writing that I truly cared about.

None of this fully made sense until my English 325 class, the Art of the Essay. In this class we wrote three personal essays on anything we wanted. I was relieved to be in this class because I was returning to the writing I was confident about. I got to tell my own stories, my own way and expected my readers to respond the way they always had, impressed at how well they were able to connect with my message.

It didn't pan out so perfectly right away. In these personal essays, I would reference things from my background or past quickly, assuming my professor and peers would understand, but it left them confused with my message and my importance. For example, I wanted to write one essay about Detroit and New York and how I felt like I cheated on my hometown city, known for its grit and hustle, to

work in the glitzy and glamorous Manhattan. I mentioned how I had worked in Detroit all of my life at my family business and loved the city and the comeback it was making.

People liked the essay but they didn't fully get it. They couldn't understand why it'd be so hard for me to move to New York after graduation. In my peer review the class enjoyed my storytelling capabilities and my prose, but I could tell they did not fully walk away with the message I was hoping they would. My professor helped me realize the inner turmoil was not about cities and location, but about family obligations and leaving parents behind. I assumed by mentioning the market that people would understand how guilty I would feel leaving my parents to work in a corporate job, but I wasn't specific enough. I did not give them enough information to understand. By forgetting about the locations and the cities and focusing on their differences and strictly discussing my family dynamics, my readers were better able to understand what Detroit and New York represented for me personally.

"It's 6:15 a.m. and I can't remember the last time I've been up this early. Real people with real jobs actually get up this early on a consistent basis. Scary. I'll have to be up this early in a week and a half to catch my flight to New York. Also scary.

I plug my iPod into the stereo, and at stoplights I search for a song that will wake me up. It's still dark outside and as I head down the on-ramp to go west on I-94 from Grosse Pointe, it feels like a Sunday night, as if I'm heading back to Ann Arbor after spending the day with my family.

*But it's not a Sunday night, it's a Saturday morning. Specifically the Saturday before Memorial Day, which means as a member of the *** family the only place I'd ever be driving to is downtown Detroit.*

So on Saturdays, when the farmers market is open and Detroiters and suburbanites flood to Russell Street and Gratiot Avenue, my family works. On holidays, when most Grosse Pointe families head down to Florida or up to Northern Michigan, my family works. And the few times a year that it's a "Holiday Saturday," a Saturday with a major holiday one or two days away, a day like today, we work through the most physically and mentally demanding day I've ever come to know." (Sidney, "Opportunity vs. Obligation")

That class, and particularly that essay about my parents helped me realize that I write to connect with others but I also write for clarity. In having to describe these deep, personal feelings for others, it helps me truly sort them out. The more I talked about New York and Detroit out loud, the more questions people asked about my parents—helping me find the true meaning.

So for my capstone project, I am putting my growth as a writer to the test. I am doing a case study on my family business to help find quick and efficient procedures that my parents, or other small businesses in Detroit could implement in order to run more effectively. In order to be successful in this project I will have to connect with my reader and make sure they understand the dynamics of our business and why my parents need this help, they'll also have to understand my academic arguments for why I suggest what I choose to suggest and finally they'll have to see the reliability in the piece. It's very personal to me but these solutions

could also be helpful if used by other small business owners in Detroit. It is the combination of the writing that I love and the writing I've learned during my time at Michigan.

As my career as a student ends, I hope to find a job in human resources. It makes me sad to think that I will not be sitting down at my laptop to write personal narratives or essays as much anymore, but I know the skills I've learned during my time here will always be useful. In whatever career I pursue, I know that I am happiest when I am connecting with others on a personal level. Whether I'm in recruiting, or employee relations, or maybe a different field entirely, I know that my job will require me to build and sustain profound relationships with others. And as I think of my future, it helps expand my whole concept of writing. I will have to sell myself, gain the trust of my clients and coworkers and the most important way to do that is for them to know who I am on a personal level. The specificity that has developed in my writing will be key. I will have to convey my messages in a succinct manner, while giving the other person enough information and background to truly understand where I am coming from.

Just like my conversation with Mrs. *** on the last day of 8th grade, school may be done, but I'll always have an audience.