THE STORY I WISH I HAD

ENG W270: FIRST PLACE

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Abstract

This essay is a personal narrative about the story behind the author's desire to become a teacher. The narrative highlights the author's journey and the challenges she faced throughout her experiences in school, which in turn provided insight into the kind of teacher she hopes to become.

I wanted to write an essay about how the teachers growing up are what inspired me to become a teacher. I wanted to write about how they were so patient, willing to assist, and encouraging, but that is not the case. This story is more of a tragedy. One where the protagonist becomes an antagonist in their own story. The character whose fate matters most in the story was switched to a passive threat; like a boulder sitting in the road. I was just a little girl who wanted nothing more than to fit in. However, all I felt was a separation between myself and everyone else. I was the boulder.

When you are a kid, you typically get a sense of excitement when you hear that school is rolling back around. That is when you get to see the same teachers, environment, fifty "friends," and the same building that you were accustomed to since kindergarten. I remembered that excitement, until it was gone. In elementary school, I was never able to grasp the concepts that were being taught as quickly as everyone else. No matter how hard I tried to stay on the same pace as my friends, I would always stumble and get stuck at some point that left me behind everyone else. It was as though we were all running the

same race, but I had obstacles in my lane that no one else had to get over. The coach was cheering the team on at the finish line instead of guiding the one who was struggling at the start.

I remember always hearing my name get called in the group that needed extra help in classes. This class in particular was reading. Every morning when the clock hit ten-thirty, I would cross my fingers in hopes that the teacher standing at the door did not call my name. I was wrong. I would hear my name get called yet again and would have to be removed into another class. I wanted so badly to grasp things as quickly as my friends who were in the advanced classes. I would always hear them talk about games that they played for prizes in that class. Instead, I was in the "slow class" (as everyone would call it) and wanting to hide from the embarrassment that showered over me.

This class was set in place to help students like me who needed extra direction with the lessons being taught. This sounds like a very positive atmosphere, except it was not. Instead of the atmosphere feeling safe and helpful for me as a student, it felt as if I was slowly drowning in my seat at the back of the class. I always felt ashamed. The patience and reassurance that I was so eager to receive from this teacher was nonexistent. I knew she was detached from the idea of genuinely helping us students by the fold in her arms each day. Not only could I tell by the disinterest in her voice, but I was able to read the body language more than the book that was placed in front of me.

These feelings did not just remain in one subject. My mind wanders to a morning in the sixth grade. My mom dropped me off at the school an hour before school started in hopes that I would grasp a better understanding of the math concept that was being taught. I can still remember walking into the room with so much excitement and joy because my teacher was taking the time to help me comprehend what I have been struggling with in class. However, I quickly realized that I was the only one excited. I recognized that body language before; the folded arms, the blank look, the lack of eye contact. It all came rushing

back to me.

However, I had that support at home, right? That was until my mom sat me down one night. She proceeded to ask if I would like to be placed on an Independent Education Plan (IEP). I remember how I felt at that moment. I was so embarrassed, ashamed, guilty, angry, and just overall defeated. I could not stand the thought of having that deathly label attached to me forever. Looking back on that moment now, I know my mom was just trying to help. However, it was more of an internal struggle with myself. I did not want that label to be the first thing that people knew about me. I was still trying to figure out why I still was not getting it. I studied hard. I did my assignments, took notes, and paid attention in class. I got extra help and used my resources. Why was it so hard for me to pick up the information that was being taught? In these moments of my life, I felt as though I was neglected and an inconvenience to those who were supposed to be helping me. These teachers are what altered my mindset not only as a student, but as a future educator as well.

In high school, I was finally able to be in those classes I was so eager to get into. After completing the ACCUPLACER test several times, I was finally able to prove that I could be placed into college-level classes. I thrived in those advanced classes too. But what was the change? I believe it was the shift in my mindset. Most kids would accept additional help from a kind parent. Most kids would accept the score they got on a placement test the first time. Most kids would accept the "poisonous" label of an IEP. Most kids would not put that much effort into their schoolwork. But not me. It was not for the classmates or teachers that I was trying to impress or get approval from anymore, but it was myself. Being in the high school part of the building was as if it was a fresh start for me. I could prove to myself that I can do it. I stopped caring about what other people thought about how long it took me to comprehend and take in the information being taught in school. It was holding me back from taking the pace I needed in order

to succeed. Once I did this, things seemed like they started to fall into place. It still takes lots of studying, extra assistance, and time in order for me to fully learn, but it is at the pace I need it to be.

And now, here I am in my third year of college, working so incredibly hard to become that teacher that I wanted and needed so badly in school. Most teachers are influenced by positive role models. Although the teachers that I had in school were not exactly positive influences, they are still the reason that I would love to be one myself someday. They are my motivation to become a teacher that a lot of students quietly seek. At least I did. I strive to be that mentor, help, and guide for students like me who feel ashamed at times. I want to be someone they feel safe asking for help. I want every student to feel as though they are wanted in my classroom and have a safe space to do so. One very crucial aspect to my day that I am going to be sure to include is daily affirmations. I am going to be sure to remind each student how important they are. This helps students gain the confidence they need to truly believe in themselves. It is something I wish I practiced at a young age. I want to be that positive difference in the children's lives; a teacher who leaves vivid memories in the minds of the students, but in a good way. I am going to make the story I wish I had in the lives of my students. ■

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