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1st Place Essay - ENGL 1000 Literacy Autobiography Contest 2018

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Madeline Lomeli

Professor Laura White

The first time that I wrote for fun, I was in a dark state of mind and I was hospitalized at the time. I was given a journal and I was told to write about whatever came to my mind. This experience gave me the idea for this paper. To write this paper, I started by free writing. I set a timer for 15 minutes and I just wrote whatever came to my mind. I took a break and then set my timer for another 15 minutes. I kept this process going until I gathered enough thoughts to form a paper. I spent a week developing multiple drafts to submit. I wasn't happy with my first draft so I asked my grandmother to read the paper. We were able to make corrections to my draft. I finally decided to submit my final first draft. The feedback I received from my peers was to cut the back-story and just dive into the journaling part. I don't think my paper would have had the effect that I wanted it to have if I did not explain my past. I think the pain that I felt in the past was a huge motivator for my writing. I wanted to express that my writing stemmed from that pain. The feedback that I received from my professor was mainly to clarify the paper chronologically. I am proud of myself for writing this paper. I showed the readers the most vulnerable part of me. That is a huge accomplishment for me. I think I used this assignment to help me accept what happened to me in the past. I used my terrible childhood to show my strength and to show how writing can impact a life in so many ways. It saved mine.

If selected, I will present my essay at GSU Research Day.

Journaling Saved My Life

I grew up in a very dysfunctional family. My parents have been breaking up and getting back together since before I was even born. My mom found out she was pregnant with me so my parents got married. They divorced when I was 2 and they have been separating and getting back together up until 2015.

I remember one time my mom and dad were arguing and she grabbed a plate of food and threw it at him. I was very young when I saw this. They would argue so much I just couldn't take it anymore. So I left the house. I was in my pajamas and I had a little bag, mainly filled with my favorite stuffed animals, and I left. I walked a couple blocks from the house and then I just sat on the sidewalk and cried. I couldn't understand why they argued so much. I didn't know why my family couldn't be like the families in movies and TV shows. I wanted a happy family full of love and kind-hearted people. I stood up and I kept walking until I heard my name. I turned around and saw my mom. She took my hand and brought me back to the house. I sat outside and listened to my mom scream at my dad about how I left and he of course said that it was her fault. They stopped talking to each other for a few days and then they were back to normal.

Some people think that spanking their kids is an appropriate way to discipline their kids. I agree with that but I think it can eventually turn into abuse. My dad would be the disciplinarian in the family. He would use different kinds of belts. Some were thin and small and others were super thick.

I remember sitting at the kitchen table and I was learning how to write at the time. My handwriting was super big and sometimes the letters wouldn't stay in the lines. This would upset my dad. He would hit his hand on the table. The sound of the hit was so

loud. It sounded like it hurt his hand. He would tell me I have one more chance to fix my letters before he got the belt. So I tried to fix my letters but it didn't work. That's just the way my handwriting was. So of course he grabbed his big, thick, leather belt and he spanked my bottom.

There was also a time when my mom didn't like the way I spoke to her. She turned to my dad and said are you really going to let her speak to me like that. He grabbed his belt and called me into the living room. He told me to drop my pants and underwear and bend over the table. My mom was standing right in front of me with the stupid smug look on her face. He told me to count each spanking and apologize to my mom after each one. So I did what I was told and I would count each one and apologize. I had tears running down my face and I would grab onto the table super hard because it hurt to bad. It wasn't just hit. It was too many to count. It hurts too much to try to remember what number I got to. I just remember pulling up my pants and underwear and running upstairs. I went up to my room and closed my door. My mom opens my door and asked to see my bottom. I showed her and she had this look on her face that I was never able to understand. She looked pleased with the marks. She left my room with a smile on her face. I went into the bathroom and looked at my bottoms. It was purple and red. There were specks of blood from the spanking on my underwear.

I would go to school after all of that. My bottom was so raw that it hurt to sit down. I would slowly sit in my seat and I would keep shifting my weight in my seat because it would feel like my whole bottom was being cut open. I wore jeans back then so that hard denim material would make my bottom feel like sandpaper was rubbing against me through my underwear. My teachers would ask my what was wrong and I

would just say that I was sore. They would think maybe from working out but little did they know that it was because my bottom would be so raw. It would heal after a couple days and then I would get hit again and it would be the same process.

I started to become very depressed and my mom wanted me to see a therapist. So I went to go talk to someone. I told the therapist about the spankings and the things that my dad would say to my mom. The therapist distracted me by having me build a pig out of clay. When I told her everything I said it as if it was normal. I didn't see anything wrong with what was going on in life. Apparently she did. She called my dad in and after that I never experienced any more spankings.

After that, he decided to hurt me mentally/emotionally. Even though my father would hurt me a lot, I still loved him and wanted him to love me back. I used to think that the spankings were his way of showing me that he loved me because he would always tell me that I would thank him when I got older and that he was doing it to make me a better person. When the spankings stopped, I just thought that he didn't love me anymore.

I would get really tired of being mistreated and hurt. I hated to hear my parents argue. I would spend a lot of time at my grandparents' house (on my dad's side). My grandparents loved me. I have so many happy memories with them. I remember waking up super early to go to the Flea Market with my grandpa. Sometimes my sister and my grandma would come with. We would get hot chocolate from Dunkin Donuts and then spend most of our day talking to different people at the Flea Market. My grandpa had a friend named Bruce and I would hate talking to him because he always smelled like cigars. Sometimes he would light one up in front of us and smoke and the smell would

make me sick to my stomach. It was always so cold there. My grandpa would give me his big coat and I used to laugh because it was like a dress on me.

My grandparents and I would spend a lot of holidays together. My parents loved to go out and party and drink so I would go to my grandparents' house and we would watch movies or have our own little holiday parties. I remember one New Years Eve, my parents went out and they dropped my sister and I off at my grandparents house. It was the best day of my life. My grandma made us piña coladas (non alcoholic of course) and we had music on and we danced all night. We put the countdown on our TV and we would count down with everyone on the TV. When midnight hit, we all yelled Happy New Year and we drank our drinks and gave each other big hugs. I felt so loved when I was with them.

I could honestly say that my grandpa was my best friend. He was the only man that has never hurt me. We would crack jokes with each other and I would tell him all of my accomplishments at school. He would be so proud of me. He would always tell me that I am going to be someone when I grew up. Back then, I wanted to be a cardiologist and he loved that I had big plans for my future. He would also tell me that I should play basketball because I was so tall. I thought he was crazy. I had so much going on at school. I didn't have time for sports.

My grandpa suffered from depression and PTSD. He fought in the Vietnam War and it messed him up in the head. He would constantly be in the hospital for suicidal thoughts. I was too young to understand what was going on. My grandpa always seemed so happy. I didn't know he was so sad.

On February 4, 2011, my grandparents asked my sister and I if we wanted to spend the night at their house. I wanted to stay home and sleep in my own bed at my own house. My sister and I ended up telling them that we would spend the night a different night.

The next morning, my dad woke my sister and I up and told us to start doing our chores. About 30 minutes after that, my grandma called my dad. My dad told my sister and I to hurry up and get in the car. We all got in the car and my dad started driving before we could even get a seatbelt on. I knew something was wrong by the way he was driving. Usually he drives cautiously and he uses turn signals and makes complete stops but this time it was different. He was driving so fast and he wasn't using his turn signal or stopping at stop signs.

We finally got to my grandparents house and my grandma opened the door. She was crying. She was speaking to my dad in Spanish so I didn't understand what she was saying. My dad told my grandma to take us upstairs and he told me to call my mom and tell her to come to their house. My dad ran downstairs and I called my mom. I told her something was wrong and dad wanted her to come to grandma and grandpa's house. She said, "Okay, I am on my way" and hung up. After I got off the phone with her, I saw paramedics rush downstairs. Immediately I thought *oh no what's wrong with grandpa*. I saw them leave with a body on a stretcher. I ran downstairs and asked my dad what was going on. But he wouldn't answer me. My mom finally arrived and he told my mom that my grandpa committed suicide.

My mom was a funeral director and embalmer at the time so she did all of the work on my grandpa. Even though she tried to cover my grandpa's neck, you could still see the mark on it from his hanging himself.

I experienced so many emotions that day. I felt sad, hurt, betrayed, but most of all I felt lost. What was I going to do without my best friends? How could he leave me like that? He was the only man that has never hurt me. How could he do this to me? How could he just leave me here all alone? It was all my fault. If I would've spent the night maybe I could've saved him. Maybe we would've found him sooner. Maybe I could've showed him how many people loved him. Maybe I could've told him that I need him to keep fighting. I needed him to see me graduate and get married. I need him to help guide me and help me grow as a person. I needed him to keep reminding me that not every man that is in my life will bring me pain. I wanted to go with him. I would've done anything to be with him.

In my family, we were taught to be strong and not to show emotion. I kissed my grandpa on the cheek for the last time and I broke down. It felt like my heart broke into a million pieces. He wasn't the same. He was so cold and so still. He no longer told jokes or hugged me back. He just lay there motionless.

I lost a huge part of me that day. I wasn't the same. I dropped most of my friends and I focused on school. I was trying to do everything I could to distract myself from the pain I felt. I went back to school and acted as if nothing happened. My freshman year I joined the basketball team, not because I liked it because I thought it would make me feel closer to my grandpa. I won multiple presidential awards and I was a member of the National Technical Honors Society. I did everything I could to make my grandpa proud. I

still wasn't happy. I still felt sad and I didn't know whom I could talk to. I had to be strong.

I fell into a deep depression. I didn't want to live with the pain anymore. I had been fighting this terrible depression for six years after my grandpa died. It was becoming harder to keep going. I couldn't get out of bed anymore. I would just lie there and shut everyone out. I didn't go out with friends or even out of my room to eat. I would spend my time sleeping. I just wanted to die.

I made it to my second semester of college. I was attending JJC part time. One night, I experimented with some muscle relaxers. I took a few and there was this euphoric feeling that came with it. My body felt really relaxed and heavy. And the pills made me sleep. The next day I did the same thing. In March of 2017, I attempted suicide with these muscle relaxers. My mom found out I took the pills and she took me to the hospital. I was admitted there that night. I was scared to be in there with a bunch of strangers but most of all I was mad at myself for failing. I kept telling myself that I shouldn't be here anymore. I should be with my grandpa.

The next morning I met with a psychiatrist at the hospital. He gave me a journal and told me to start writing. I asked him what I should write and he told me whatever comes to my mind. So I took the journal and a couple pencils back to my room and set them on my bed. I thought that it was pointless. I kept telling myself that as soon as I got out of the hospital I was going to try again but this time I would not fail.

I refused to eat the whole time I was in the hospital. I just stood in my room the whole time. I wouldn't show up for groups or talk to any of the counselors. Finally I decided to journal. I just let my mind go free and wrote down every thought I had. I

couldn't stop writing. Every painful detail of my life just poured out of me. Sometimes the writing would hurt so bad that the counselor would have to snap me out of my mind and remind me where I was. Writing was like an addiction to me. I would bring the journal out to the little TV room that they had and I would journal while everyone watched TV. I would journal while everyone would eat. I would give my food to other people so the counselors would think I was eating. I would hide my pencils in my sock or bra so the counselors couldn't take it away at nighttime. I wrote the most at night. I filled up a whole journal in 3 days. My psychiatrist would read it and analyze it with me. He diagnosed me with major depression and PTSD. I was able to share my life with people without talking about it. I was able to show people the pain in my heart without them hearing how weak I sounded. I was able to finally share these emotions that I bottled up for so long.

I continued to journal for the whole week that I was in there. I learned so much about myself. I was able to see that the things I experienced as a child was not normal. I learned that I had to let my emotions out. I couldn't keep bottling them up. I had to let myself grieve over everything that I lost. Most of all, I learned to let go of negative people. I learned to love people who hurt me from a distance.

I no longer live with my mom or my dad. I live with my maternal grandparents. I finally have a family. I still journal at night before I fall asleep or in the morning when I get home from work.

I would probably be six feet under if it weren't for the journals. When I got out of the hospital I went to the outpatient program and I learned how to love myself. Writing is

the safest way for me to express my feelings. It means so much to me. Without it, I don't know what I would do.