

I've learned from my father always by tonytonycc

On many an evening, my father, who is short and stout and enjoys tea out of teapots, jumps on a small trampoline in our living room for 30 to 45 minutes*. For exercise, he says. It's just like running, he says. Remember when he jumped rope a few years ago? It's almost as good as that, he says.

The week I came home from college last month, we were both in the living room, watching a Yankee game in our typical formation — I was on the couch, and he was burning calories, allegedly. Our conversation jumped around unremarkably, until one thing led to another, which led to something else, which led to my father stating that his grandfather had died while serving in World War II, during the siege in Sevastopol.

All I said was, “Oh.” I might have said, “Wow.” But that's how it goes in my family**. While my parents go to yoga class and shop at Whole Foods and own an SUV, they can still be very un-American. We have never had Important Family Talks. Information about the past is revealed randomly and sparingly and only when there isn't any way around it.

But I've pieced most of it together. I know he wrestled in high school, until his coach told him he had to cut his long, John Lennon-esque locks to stay on the team. I know he had a previous marriage – I found that out by accident in the car many years ago, after I made some joke about having many wives, and he thought I was serious. He has no secret children. Phew.

I also know that he is unbelievably smart, smarter than I will ever be, and I know he's come a long way because of that brain. When he first arrived in America in 1981, he washed dishes at an Italian restaurant every night. He did his furniture shopping during spring cleaning season, scouring the Philadelphia streets for old mattresses and tables that could still be used.

Years later, when he was the one enjoying a comfortable suburban life, he had to cope with the sudden death of his father and his mother's drawn-out and excruciating battle with cancer, somehow suppressing his emotions the entire way to shield his young and mostly unaware child. And he's never asked anything of me, and he's spoiled me, and he has more faith in me than I have in myself. But, you know, none of that is ever really said out loud.

So I asked him the question. It sounded odd in my head, and it sounded just as strange when I said it out loud. He looked at me, either amused or confused.

“Something you don't know? I'm going to lose weight doing this. You'll see.” And then he kept bouncing.

**Jumps is a stretch — he engages in a slow, rhythmic bounce. If I didn't love him as much as I do, I would call it a jiggle.*

***During a similar night over winter break, he mentioned that his mother and grandma escaped the Holocaust by moving from Ukraine to Moscow just months before the occupation.*



I overcame my first break up by schoi94

"A bacteria culture is placed under a strict controlled environment"

My swollen eyes glazed over the words for the seventh time, once again unable to absorb any of the meaning. I took a deep breath and tried again.

"A bacteria culture is placed—"

It was no use. My eyes were already wandering over to the clock by the time I got to the fifth word.

10:32

He was probably boarding the plane right now. I imagined myself spontaneously running out of the classroom and catching a cab to stop him from leaving as I had seen in the movies. "Stop it", I told myself. I wouldn't allow such dramatic thoughts to cross my mind.

"A bacteria culture is—"

In an attempt to act nonchalantly about his leaving, I had somehow split into two conflicting personalities. One part of me longed to wallow in my self-pity, while the other side demanded that I move on. Stop crying over a petty high school relationship.

"A bacteria culture—"

But I didn't want to be here. I wanted to be there, wherever he was. I didn't want to see or talk to anyone. Tears flooded my eyes and dropped into my open, useless textbook. I remembered the gut-wrenching feeling I got after he closed the door behind him.

"A bacteria—"

But how could I let a breakup interfere with my concentration? When did I become so dependent? I wanted to stop pitying myself. I kept reminding myself that I lived a good life and that if the biggest problem I had was breaking up with my boyfriend, then I had it pretty easy.

"A bacteria culture is placed—"

Of course, it wasn't that easy. He was the person I always went to when I was upset, hysterical, happy. Now who was I to turn to? He's on an airplane going to a country halfway across the world. How was I supposed to get through the rest of my high school without him?

"A bacteria culture is placed under—"

What kind of question is that? Of course I could get through high school without him. I don't need him and I don't need anyone but myself. I'm only sixteen after all, and there's no such thing as "true love" in high school. It's only what we conjure in our minds to make-believe a crush as anything but a transient infatuation.

"A bacteria culture is placed under a strict controlled environment."

I closed my textbook. Then I closed my eyes. A bacteria culture is placed, A bacteria culture is placed... The voices were buried beneath the words to a whisper, and then eventually there was silence. Maybe it's as simple as that. No need to choose sides, no need to be one or the other. I admit that I do need people, but this doesn't mean that I'm "needy." I need to acknowledge my emotions as long as I know that they are helping me grow. Growing pains. These are just growing pains.



Prom: Catching a Fairytale by CiaoBella14

It's almost April. The petit droplets from the sky begin to fall, creating a wet shine on the already glamorous month when people begin to obsess over prom. The hallway is full of excitement, students chirping gossip back and forth about who's asking who. But the excitement doesn't end here; awareness about the amazing night of prom has spread to kids at younger and younger ages.

Before its even spring, it's prom season in my small New Jersey high school. Colorful cupcakes spelling out p-r-o-m-? begin popping up in class. Huge banners asking the same show up in the cafeteria. Even sushi spells out the most popular word of the season. Sneaky cell phones slip out of pockets so that everyone can see the most perfect dress, heels, and makeup. And whatever room you walk into, someone is whispering about the popular theme.

The anxiety sinks in two days after tickets go on sale. Is he going to ask me? Should I ask him first? They'll be on sale for another week, but no one has the patience to possibly wait that long. The excitement heightens to a new level as friend's debate waiting to ask someone to prom. Some underclassmen give each other bemused looks. Why is this such a big deal? It's just a fancier version of our last dance... Only the seniors can stay overnight at Wildwood anyway.

Although some people are naïve to the 'huge' milestone of prom, the majority have heard about it for years before high school. As I'm the oldest of four girls, I never had an older sibling to watch get ready for the big night. When I was in forth grade though, my babysitter invited my sisters and me to her house to see her and her friends before prom. I can still remember, six years later, how I thought I knew a princess. She looked gorgeous in her lavender gown, standing next to a tall, handsome boy in a suit (obviously a prince). When the limo pulled up my prediction was confirmed. No one would ride in such a car unless they were royalty. My babysitter was definitely a princess, and I couldn't wait for my turn.

Now my sisters are in fifth and sixth grade. I don't think they remember that day when I was exposed to my favorite fantasy, but the media's helped them get excited about the event nonetheless. This year alone, I've seen my sisters reading books such as Prom, and now Disney Channel has come out with a movie called "Prom". Expectations for prom are rising for young kids. By the time it's their turn to experience the big night, I'm afraid that it might not be everything they dreamed for. Next year I will be a junior, the first year I'll be able to attend and I'm so excited for the magic of the night. I've waited so many years to catch my own fairytale and I'll admit, my expectations are pretty high.



Prom: To Go or Not to Go by Williamgage2011

To Prom, or not to Prom, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the tuxes and dresses of outrageous fashion or to take naps in the seas of laziness, and by opposing, end it. To dance – to sleep – all night; and by a sleep to say we end the headache, and the thousand unnatural moves that feet aren't heir to. 'Tis an abomination devoutly to be wished. To dance – to sleep. To sleep – perchance to dream: ay, there's the limo! For in that pain of dancing what moves may come when we have shuffled off these painful heels, must give us pause. There's the respect that makes the calamity of so long night. For who would bear the heels and pain of time, the DJ's song, the proud guys dance moves, the pains of fake love, the DJ's delay, the insolence of chaperones, and the pain that patient merit of the King and Queen make, when they themselves might their vanity make with sparkly dress? Who would these peers bear, to dance and strut on a long South Carolina night, but that the dread of dancing after dark – The undiscovered restroom, from whose boredom no date returns – puzzles the will, and makes us rather bear the regrets we have than dance with others that we know not of? Thus embarrassment does make cowards of us all, and thus the naïve hue of vanity is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of doubt, and enterprises of great dancing and merriment with this regard the cowards turn away and lose the name of King. – adapted from William Shakespeare, Hamlet, ACT III, SC I



Marriage: You're Stuck With Me by kaleighsomers

The fact that people even propose the question of marriage having any value troubles me. It's the same reason I began blogging for The Good Woman Project back in early February. I knew that someone out there had lost hope in the big M word. And that was not okay with me.

My parents have been married 26 years. They met in high school, dated through college, and ended up with two crazy daughters that made them want to pull their hair out. But now they're empty nesters and my impression is that they're loving it.

Go ahead and groan. Let it all out.

Done?

Okay, good. So why is marriage such a big deal? And why should you listen to someone whose parents are not just a number to add to the divorce statistics? It's simple: because I'm not married or in a relationship myself.

It's easy to say love is a many splendored thing when you can't see straight because you're blinded by its mystifying powers. But I'm not. I'm telling you right now that marriage is good. It is worth it.

Marriage means being stuck with someone else for the rest of your life. We've sort of lost sight of that being a good thing and gotten to be experts in running in the opposite direction. For a lot of teens and 20somethings, marriage is freaking them out. Big time. Who wants to be stuck with someone until they die?

Me.

I want to be stuck with someone who drives me crazy four out of seven days out of the week. Any more than that's a deal breaker. Kidding, of course.

I want someone to listen to me when I'm upset, someone who sits next to me and tells me it's going to be okay when maybe it really, definitely, almost for sure isn't going to be okay. I want someone to lie to me twenty-four seven and make me believe those lies. I want someone to tell me I'm beautiful and changing things in this world and I want to tell someone else the same thing.

Sure, you can have friends like that. But what if you fall in love with said friend? You won't marry him or her because you're freaked out that you might someday resent that person?

Holding back and making giant assumptions never got anyone anywhere. Marriage is the only real leap of faith left in this world. We need to remember that and embrace it before the entire institution goes out of style like a bad fad from the nineties.

Marriage isn't a fad. It's sticking around, so get used to it.

Marriage: Let Me Keep My Childhood Dream by purpleoveralls

"Oh, I don't believe in marriage."

The first time I heard my friend say those words with such an air of apathy, I was completely shocked. Marriage isn't Santa Claus; how do you not believe in it? Then I realized many others shared my friend's philosophy, calling marriage an overrated, capitalistic institution that usually resulted in divorce anyway.

Of my close friends, only two have divorced parents. These are also the only two who express any discontent with marriage. The negative effect divorce has on children is inevitable; a generation raised by single or separated parents have adopted the idea that marriage never lasts and divorce always hurts, thus it would only make sense to skip the process altogether and spare the heartbreak at the end.

But this depressing trend has exceptions. Like me.

My friends have known me for years, but barely anyone knows that my parents are divorced. Even my little half-sister is not aware I'm her half-sister. Everyone automatically assumes that my stepdad is my biological dad because our family seems too harmonious to be of a second marriage. And also because I never bothered to correct them in their false assumptions.

I try to avoid thinking about my parents' divorce at all costs. If I ponder it for too long, the pain I've kept at bay for so long rushes back again, and before I know it, I'm having an emotional breakdown 11:37 at night. Sometimes, I'm afraid that if I don't constantly push the thoughts away, if I don't pretend, then perhaps I'll learn to distrust marriage too. I don't want that. I'm still desperately clinging onto that childhood dream in which the princess marries the prince and they live happily ever after.

I know from personal experience the effect divorce has on children and I would never put my own child through that misery. But instead of giving up on marriage like my friend has, I will take the risk because I'm a fighter. I will get married, stay married, and raise my children with the one thing I lacked: the assurance that yes, marriages do last.

50% of all marriages end in divorce. That's a scary statistic. So let's prove it wrong, one successful marriage at a time. I think the future generation is worth it. I think love is worth it.



My Cause: To Write Love On Her Arms promotes more than ink poisoning by writexmusic

Welcome to my life.

I'm your stereotypical sixteen-year-old girl, stressing about school and college, hanging out with her friends, trying to find a boyfriend, rebelling against her parents, ignoring her siblings, and discovering her passion and life dreams (cliché, right?)

Except, there is a twist.

I live in a town where the suicide rate is well above average. In 2008, a local teenager hung himself and a mother burned herself alive (and that's a lot considering I live in a town of about 10,000.)

Although I didn't know either of them, a related problem has occurred in my life.

Cutting.

I'm not going to sit here, and type away a lie. I'm not going to claim that I was a former cutter who saw the light, just so that I can win a contest. No, I'm going to give you the real story.

The first time I was exposed to this self-inflicting behavior was in 6th grade, when my friend explained why she had scars up and down her arms. At the time, I didn't think much of it.

In 8th grade, two more of my friends admitted to similar behavior.

Now, due to the stress of high school, the cutting rate has skyrocketed. Out of my 10 closest girl friends, 6 of them have partaken in this behavior at least once. That's a whopping 3:5 ratio!

According to my friends, self-injury is a way to release the pain they feel inside.

And that's where the non-profit organization To Write Love On Her Arms (TWLOHA) comes into play. The idea behind the name was to write the word love on your arm, instead of cutting yourself. Use a pen, not a knife.

TWLOHA focuses on something that affects my life. Here is an excerpt from the To Write Love On Her Arms website.

“MISSION STATEMENT: To Write Love on Her Arms is a non-profit movement dedicated to presenting hope and finding help for people struggling with depression, addiction, self-injury and suicide. You were created to love and be loved. You need to know that your story is important and that you're part of a bigger story. You need to know that your life matters.”

Even as an observer, those words speak to me. This organization doesn't just help those who struggle, but it helps those who watch the struggler.

It's also an organization that every girl can relate to. When we get dumped, fail a test, lose a friend, it's nice to know someone or someone, will be there to tell us that we're loved and our life does matter.

TWLOHA is taking the time to teach the younger generation, because we are the future. Starting young, we learn and take things that we will keep and remember for the rest of our lives. TWLOHA is just giving us all hope that we have our whole lives ahead of us, and we shouldn't waste that beautiful blessing.

<http://www.twloha.com/>



Money: Affinity Gone Awry by ishmealarmageddon

Dear Money,

You're a two-timing lousy piece of paper. I've tried saving you my entire life (and trust me, it's no easy feat). And through all that time, you have the gall to inform me that you've been around in other people's pants? What is this? Has my lifelong relationship with you been a sham? I thought we had something special. But I guess I was wrong. And the worst part of this whole ordeal is your blatant apathy. You never cared about me (or anybody else for that matter) as much as I cherished you.

Taking myself out of this situation, you've been a malignant tumor upon the lives of my family and friends. I hate that my family talks about you more than anything else - they even worry about you. You've put my family through a lot, you know. I don't expect you to apologize but you could at least compensate us with your presence more often. It's a similar dilemma with my friends. We can never hang out because they don't have enough of you - and I think that makes them sad enough to stay home all the time. You should be ashamed of yourself.

And I'm going to college next year. I need you more than ever because college fees are expensive. In retrospect, I suppose you felt like I was using you this entire time. But that's not the least bit true. I put you away, didn't I - in a safe and secure place? You were never water damaged or crumpled into a wad of crinkly mass, were you? I was always good to you yet you've put me through this hell. And you're not exactly the perfect specimen of entity, either. You're heavily associated with one of the Seven Deadly Sins - you're the primary source of greed.

I also hear that people sell their whimsical aspirations and passions for mundane occupations because the latter is more lucrative. I'm not sure how this makes you feel but it certainly depresses me. You know what? Though you may constantly haunt me throughout my life, you'll never dominate my dreams and ambitions. I intend to become a writer, traveler extraordinaire, and humanitarian whether you're on for the ride with me or not. It'll be a difficult journey but anything worthwhile in life is complicated. Trust me, I'll find a way to make my hopes and goals into a tangible product of reality. Just you wait!

And even through all this trouble, shame, sorrow, and unhappiness, I guess what I'm struggling to say is - well, I still want you, even if you don't want me . . . but I'll never need you. I've got everything I'll ever need - a brain, a heart, courage, and an imaginary place called home.

Sincerely,
Justina



I'm Thankful for Quiet by jasoncaleb

It's quiet here, in this college library, where I sit and write without interruptions. Peace, quiet, contentment: these three things I cannot take for granted. I say this because I know all too well the chaos, the stress, and the realness of what goes on outside this sanctuary of tranquil solitude. Beyond this building there is a commotion going on with people trying to get to work, there are wars going on in distant places, and there is strife between men. But here, there is peace, there is quiet, and I feel content.

I am a twenty-four year old freshman college student. I've had a late start it seems like, yet in a way, I feel that it was necessary for me to put off academia until now, because now I can appreciate it in a better way. For four and a half years I served in the United States Marine Corps. Within that time I went on two seven-month long deployments to Iraq and one deployment to Afghanistan. Between these deployments I trained, tried to have a personal life, succeeded in getting married, and fortunately I survived to see my wife again and to move on with a new life with her.

There are a lot of things I'm thankful for. I'm grateful to have a lovely wife who supports me and makes my life warm and more meaningful. I'm thankful for real food that is cooked in a real kitchen, running water, a real shower, and a comfortable bed at night. These things I used to take for granted because I grew up living in a country where, for the most part, these things are expected. It is hard to imagine a world without these simple pleasures. For most of us we see a lot of these things as necessities. Yet the places I've been to in Iraq and Afghanistan, I didn't always get these things, and I witnessed other people who didn't have it as good as we do here. The sad truth of our society is, we don't realize how good it really is, unless we step away from it into a different world.

Although I'm thankful for these things, there is nothing I am more grateful for than the solitude I feel as I write this. Each morning I have the freedom to wake up and drive to this college. Every morning I get here early, so that I can find a quiet spot in the library where I can challenge and expand my mind in ways other than the ways of war. Here I can sit and read such things as literature or philosophy, and I am able to ponder the ideas of the scholars before me. I am no longer expected to be a warrior. And I am not so sure now what exactly I am called to be from now on, but for now I'll sit here quietly, soaking up the serenity.



What Stresses Me Out: The Future by Nguyelil001

Stress. A word I know all too well. Words can't even describe what makes my head spin and stomach twist when I'm approached by a deadline, or even the thought of graduating high school. What makes me stressed out can all be expressed in one word: the future.

While I'm comfortably sitting in front of my modest Dell desktop computer, penning this fine piece of literature (I'm totally kidding), my own mother starts lecturing me of what I am to do with the gift God has given me. I simply give her my first thoughts: "I really enjoy playing the guitar and writing short stories."

Her face fades from an optimistic glow to a dim candle of remorse. While her big smile slowly becomes flat-lined, she replies, "Uhhmm, I think those types of things would be better suited for a side project or a hobby."

She then starts listing off professions more suited for what fits her idea of success. Doctors, lawyers, architects, and pharmacists are a few jobs that seem to meet her standards. At this point, I wouldn't dare express my dreams of living in New York, writing for Saturday Night Live, yelling at Yankees games, playing small gigs and folding my pizza in half--- Brooklyn style.

It's not that I'm naturally a rebellious child and decide not to work hard for admission into the Ivy League dreams my parents would be ever so proud of. But I've just never had a love for the doctor's office or the idea of making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. I am a good student though, always making the honor roll with a 3.8 GPA, having a high place as a high school scholar in the school's honor society, as well as taking a number of AP classes.

But I guess I can understand where my mother's coming from. Both she and my father had escaped Vietnam during the war, hoping for a better life. So I can see why they have a "the sky is the limit" attitude on everything I do. I'm also not saying that it's a bad thing. But on a journey to find a profession that both fills my personal needs and my parent's expectations is where I find most of my stress.

The thought of not succeeding or not being happy with every decision really worries me. The way I see it is that questions and decisions are what make life. Questions and "what ifs" make us think but decisions make us stressed because we have to answer the question set upon us. The future can either be good or bad, based on the decisions we make now. It is such a broad and bright idea, but can also be a dark and scary tunnel because we all really only have "one life to live" (reference intended).

All in all, how I'm going to spend the rest of my life is what stresses me out.



My Hero is Friedl Dicker-Brandeis by EcoFaery

On October 9th, 1944, a remarkable woman died in the Nazi gas chambers, but she was a hero in one of the truest senses of the word.

In 1942, she and her husband Pavel were taken by the Nazis to Terezin Concentration Camp with a limited amount of baggage. Many people brought clothing, special belongings and valuables with them. But Friedl thought not of her own needs, but of the needs of the children who would be interned with her. They would be lonely, frightened, angry and sad, and they would need a way to express those feelings.

Friedl was a talented artist. She had studied many different art forms for years, everything from textiles and bookbinding to watercolor and charcoal. And so naturally she stuffed her bags with art supplies and used art to help the children. Unbeknownst to the Nazis, Friedl and the other teachers interned at Terezin taught children forbidden subjects. Friedl helped the children to escape from the harsh world and retreat to a world of creativity, and, unlike the other teachers, she did it for free.

Friedl did not expect thanks for what she did. She taught because the children needed a teacher. Because of this she was not only a teacher, but a bringer of hope.

Too often do people expect thanks or reward for something kind that they've done. At its essence, a kindness is not something done for personal gain; it's something done purely for the benefit of another. Many people don't seem to realize that; Friedl Dicker-Brandeis did. She selflessly gave her time, kindness, supplies and talent to the children of Terezin Concentration Camp, and for that she ought never to be forgotten.

It can be hard to remember to be kind. Our world is one where people are concerned more for themselves than for others, and sometimes thoughtfulness is something that simply slips our minds.

It is important that we strive to prevent that from happening. Friedl's kindness was a large one under extreme circumstances, but kindness isn't about how much you give- it's about how you give it. If you act kindly while expecting recognition and praise, you are doing it more for yourself than anyone else. But if you act purely out of thoughtfulness and consideration for another- that is a true kindness.

Friedl's kindness came directly from her heart. She didn't teach for the recognition- she taught because she knew that the children needed her help.

Learning about Friedl Dicker-Brandeis was inspiring because her story shows that hope can bloom even in the coldest of environments; that creativity can change the world, even if that world is the dream world of a child; and above all that even in the darkest of situations, the kindness and goodness inside of us can find a way to shine.



Improve Education: An Educational Renaissance by jakeethe

Perhaps I'm the only one who notices the increasing disinterest in education in my school. Or, perhaps, I'm merely overreacting to its inevitability. Maybe it's the brief conversations containing multitudes of grammatical errors that I often hear throughout the hallways, or the numerous students who admit to not caring about school that have led me to this conclusion: The majority of teenagers have lost interest in school as a source of knowledge.

There is no need to take my word for it. Take a glance at the 300+ people at my school on Facebook chat in comparison to the 90 that have stayed after school for extracurricular activities. Observe the increasing number of parents appeasing their children with cash or new cell phones for sub-par grades. Listen to the two troublemakers in the back of the classroom that would rather chat about what parties they plan on attending this weekend than acknowledge the teacher's presence. As a site of social gathering, school has remained prominent. As a site of learning however, school has become nearly obsolete.

The unfortunate truth, however, is that the educational system is not responsible for this decline in student interest. Rather, it is simply human nature. As children mature, they begin to become interested in other fields and, subsequently, lose interest in school.

Rather than attempt to make insignificant reforms to the educational system that waste school funds or shove history down the student's throats, we must instead take a page out of it. The current actions of the educational system currently could easily be likened to that of the European Reformation. We are attempting to reform the educational system in hopes that the students will follow, causing a rise in interest. However, if we truly wish to revitalize student interest in school, we must take a look at an occurrence just prior to the Reformation: The Renaissance, a rebirth of learning throughout Western Europe. Rather than attempting to mold the educational system around students in hopes of an increase in interest, we must target the students directly. Much like the Renaissance promoted the value of knowledge in order to increase education, schools must do the same. School must be conveyed as a means of building minds, not merely a place to build futures.

This task is, understandably, difficult, but not inconceivable by any means. Revitalization in student interest throughout the country is achievable, albeit difficult. As students burst through the doors this coming year, we must make it clear to them that school is a place of knowledge and learning. As the journalist Sydney J. Harris so eloquently put it, "The whole purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows." Whether it be through after school programs and clubs, motivational speakers, or even student testimonials, the idea of school as a site of broadening and exploring knowledge, rather than a site of sole repetition and test taking must be emphasized throughout the minds of all students come the new school year. Only then will the concept of a truly effective educational system become a reality.



Media: I Like it Black, White, and Read All Over by sissysulli

There's advertising, broadcast, digital, electronic, hyper-, mass, multi-, news, and social media. To name a few. But squeezed into dusty corners reserved for antediluvian ancients like myself, there's also a kind of media that is often forgotten in the seizure-inducing haze of disco-reminiscent electronica clouding the media horizon: print media.

Print media influences me above and beyond any other form of media. It remains the oldest form of media, stemming back to 3500 BC when cylinder seals were still used in ancient Mesopotamia and the iPhone would have been worshiped as a glowing god sent from the gates of heaven.

It's through print media that we can look back through time and study Plato's view on philosophy, Plutarch's comparison of Greek and Roman heroes, Shakespeare's soliloquies, and Dickinson's scribbled poetry. It's through print media that we delve into worlds, lives, thoughts, and beliefs not our own. It's through print media that humanity is bound together in one common love of knowledge, learning, and legacy.

As a child, it was not with an iPod or a laptop that I curled into the boughs of the Bradford pear tree in the backyard, but rather with Johnny Tremain and Huckleberry Finn. As I grew older, my companions evolved into Robinson Crusoe, Lily Bart, Oliver Twist, Jane Eyre, and Bartleby the Scrivener.

Everyone knows to be wary of the airbrushed, malnourished models gracing the covers of *Seventeen* and *Vogue*, that radio and TV ads are doing everything within their power to manipulate their audience to buy their products, that we spend far too much time drooling over our computer screens and not speaking face-to-face with our friends and family. All this has become common knowledge, and yet we continue to buy subscriptions to *Seventeen*, listen to the radio, and spend hours a day on our computers.

Books, on the other hand, remain the most trustworthy media-source, the things our teachers prefer on our bibliographies over the most reliable URL addresses. Books have survived the test of time. Books have proved tired and true. And when the day is dead and done, future historians will study not our YouTube videos so much as our literature.

Electronic media may have a wide grip on society, but so does print media. Through what other outlet can millions of people throughout history all relate to Sir Ivanhoe and the lovely Rowena? I've always been awed by the fact that I can read and enjoy the same book as Charlotte and Emily Bronte. Print media has bound humanity together with a shared heritage, a shared history, and a shared passion since the naissance of primordial hieroglyphs and ideographs.

As such, it is print media that influences me the most. When I feel the beginnings of a headache tapping at my frontal lobe after a roller coaster ride of kaleidoscopic sound and color at the theater or on YouTube, I'm always ready for the monochromatic simplicity of the printed page. Even when the future is unsure, we still have our past.



Food: Necessity or Excuse? by ACstudent

I have been a bit overweight for a while now, basically since the 4th grade.

At first, I was told, “don’t worry sweetheart, it’s just baby fat. It’ll go away as you grow.” But all of the excuses I had made for myself in middle school failed. I was caught in this perpetual cycle of unhappiness. I didn’t want to be big, so I ate my feelings, but obviously that emotional trickery was causing the problem to begin with. I had been fed statistic after statistic, but simply couldn’t get the motivation I was looking for from myself.

I thought about why the rate of obesity was increasing to begin with. Did people care less about weight? Did people now ignore their appearances? Why was it that people ignored the risks and damages of being overweight and simply continued on with their dangerous lifestyles?

And then I found the statistic that explained it all: “obesity is more than twice as common among women in lower socioeconomic groups as among women in higher ones.”

The reasoning behind this is that people in lower socioeconomic groups aren’t looking to spend a ton of money at Whole Foods when they can easily go to the nearest fast-food restaurant and pick up the same amount for a lot less. If anything, obesity speaks more of the economic turmoil this nation suffers than the lack of motivation or lethargy people are accused of. So if the health risks aren’t enough to make one change his or her mind about eating habits, than you may just be tackling the wrong issue first.

However, there are also other concerns in this topic, an example of which might be the influence of the media. The public is being given mixed signals. Most of the time, shows encourage healthy weight loss and eating. However, every so often I stumble upon a show or commercial that takes one step forward, only to take two steps back.

For example, I took a look at the show *Huge*. The story of overweight children who go to camp to better their nutritional habits, and in that show, we are given a heroine: this bright young woman who is confident and proud of the way she looks. On one hand, we are given the idea ‘I’m confident and proud of my body, why should I change for other people?’ but the show seems to completely ignore the fact that the poor girl is just waiting for health complications.

Now which do we believe? ‘Be proud of your body. Don’t care what other people think.’ Or ‘Eat healthy. Be happy.’

So here’s my solution for the emotional aspect of the matter...

Yes, be proud of some curves if you’ve got them. But there’s a fine line between proud and stubborn. Make sure you know where that line is drawn, because if you don’t the nation will be risking ‘pride’ for health and well-being.

As for obesity as an epidemic, I feel as though until we can improve our economic effect, change may be beyond the control of some suffering.

Statistic from: (http://www.obeseinfo.com/morbid_obesity_information.htm)

**Oil Spill: Preserving Nature's Splendor** by mchao31

“Thank God men cannot fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth.” As evident through Henry David Thoreau’s saying, human waste and pollution existed even in the nineteenth century. Throughout time, we learned to reduce our footprint on the Earth. Increasing trends of global warming have alerted many people to adjust their lives in order to save themselves. However, even to this day, some people still exhibit a flagrant disregard for the planet, and the consequences are apparent. In order to save our planet’s environment, as well as our own hides, society must consider being less wasteful.

It may seem obvious that being wasteful is a key contributor to Earth’s demise, but one can easily prove otherwise. Two things that people often take for granted are oil and water. According to statistics involving the oil usage throughout the world, the United States of America ranks in at first place with a whopping twenty million barrels used daily. China, the preceding country, uses only seven million barrels daily, and the population of China is four times that of the United States. Despite the fact that the United States uses the most oil, the world must realize a group effort is required to lessen their oil usage as well. Sure enough, the United States needs to reduce oil consumption. For example, there exists various means at our hands which can lessen our impact on the world such as: solar energy, wind energy, or even water energy. With BP’s recent and on-going oil spill epidemic, citizens need to seriously consider a change of plans in the near future. This oil spill drastically affects marine life as it spreads throughout the water.

Water is an essential. However, mankind treats it otherwise. From excessively long showers to unnecessary cloth washing, it is apparent that water is used unsparingly. It is not difficult to conserve our water resources. On non-sweltering days where you just lay around at home, you can skip one shower for the day. On average, one uses three gallons of water per minute in a shower, and a typical shower lasts for five to six minutes. Thus, you can save up to eighteen gallons of water. I am not recommending that one should diminish his hygiene; rather, I am recommending that one should consider the appropriateness of his intent to shower. It may seem extreme to do such a thing, but at this point, extreme measures are necessary if mankind desires to continue its existence.

As we preside over the planet, creating waste is inadvertent. However, being wasteful is not. As society advances, technology follows suit. This technology can be used to create a diminution of our impact, but people must actively participate to become less wasteful in conjunction with humanity’s progression.

College is Difficult Because: We Don't Reach All Our Goals by sean_wang

Disappointment – my greatest fear in the world. It is a mental plague, a malicious demon in the obscurities of my mind. It chops me down from my lofty heights, cleaves me open with the painful axe of failed expectations, and erodes me away until nothing is left but sawdust. It shuts the lights whenever I conjure a bright idea, sneering as I crawl pathetically in the dark in desperate search of self-approval. There is no greater pain than its intangible sting, no worse feeling than the bitter realization of falling short. I cannot stand the truth, that I practiced for weeks but missed the target, that I trained for years but lost in the first round, that I pushed my physical being to its limit and forced the efforts of an eternity through the lifeblood of my soul, but still never reached my goals. I can pretend all I want, ponder all that could have and should have happened, but reality is cruel; dreams do not always come true.

Some people dream of attending college. They yearn for an education because they desire its boundless benefits: its potential to craft economic stability, its prestige as a source of family and social pride, its practicality in teaching essential technical skills, and its unquestionable ability to put limitless joy in life. These diligent men, women, and young adults are motivated to study and prioritize their schooling. They persistently chew their way through textbooks so they can one day emerge from the cocoon and enjoy the high skies of education. They forgo luxuries and work multiple jobs so they can save hard-earned money for tuition. Students like Shane Burrows and Kathryn McCormick work their butts off, yet there is no guarantee that they will succeed. But what force holds them back? What barrier prevents them from reaching that mountain top, from becoming college graduates?

As a to-be high school senior, I am already crumbling under the pressure of college. I am afraid. What if no college wishes to accept me? How will my parents and teachers judge me if I am universally rejected? More importantly, how will I judge myself? The sinister hand of disappointment pulls the strings once more as I envision all my high school years becoming nothing but wasted effort. Like Shane and Kathryn, I am a fish swimming upstream, a student struggling day in and day out to keep his head above the water. College is tough, but college is rewarding. Our minds will be battlefields as we learn to combat our shortcomings and focus on the challenges ahead. Our hearts will no longer swell with the burning angst of remorse or failure, but with the beating optimism of what we can accomplish, of what we will accomplish. And many years later, when we are old and prosperous, we will look back and remember the past, a golden age free of regret.