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ENGL 1000 Writing Studies 1 Autobiography Contest

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# Honorable Mention - ENGL 1000 Literacy Autobiography Contest 2019

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Rachel Beckmann

Professor White

### Papers and Current Events

Literacy has always played a big role in my life. As a child, I had a full imagination which I expressed in numerous ways. From playing imaginary to writing stories, all the way to Journalism class in High School—it has always been important to be literate and for writing to be a part of my life. I was inspired by my High School Yearbook Advisors, Mrs. Mead and Mrs. Honel, from Peotone High School, to complete a yearbook of my own to share with my class during my Senior Year. That was the most recent journey I experienced of literacy, but that idea makes me want to look back into my childhood. I always remember laying down at my childhood home, checking out my parent's yearbooks from their glory days. I knew, then, at such a young age, that I would make one myself someday. However, before I achieved that subconscious goal of mine, I created works of fiction. As a child, as you can imagine, it was not very serious works, but simple few pages of text surrounding the theme of chocolate volcanoes and a crafty twelve-year-old. While my memory is not the best, I remember these pieces of life due to general timelines of events in which they have occurred, not by dates on the calendar; for it is not the days that count, it is the moments that are made.

Before Obama was elected into office, before I had to think about the SAT, where to apply to college, or before I learned to use the lattice method, I would rest my stomach upon the army green, shaggy carpet of my childhood living room. Nine yearbooks were sprawled around me, engulfing me in the memories of other people much older than me, faces that I had never known the names of before this moment. Their surnames may be different now; many of them

climbing into their late forties; and very few probably remember the moments I had been studying. I was to remember those moments for them if they had not themselves owned a copy of these pages glued together. The papers may be tucked away in a storage unit, drowned in other moments of their lives which were to be forgotten, or they may be proudly displayed as if it were a shrine to reflect back onto their glory days. Whichever the case may be, I was always intrigued by the fonts that were used, the mistypes of the old style print, and the idea that the photographs were all portrayed in black and white.

The year before Osama Bin Laden was found I was not reading the news. Rather, I was sitting at the office computer, typing my short stories. One, titled “The Chocolate Volcano,” expressed a fictional trip my classmates and I took with my third grade teacher, Mr. Mikus, to a tropical chocolate-filled volcano. This would be expanded to be set in the Solar System, of course, or more specifically, Mars, like any other typical pre-adolescent would speak about, topped off with using guns which shot pudding at aliens rather than bullets.

Another short adventure was written about a main character named Caitlin Phillips who was a self-made child artist: an obscure painter, which was her escape from messy life at home. This, I wrote, at the kitchen bar, propped up in a stool which did not allow my heel to touch the tile. I was letting my imagination flow.

Around the same time which I wrote about paint, the art store, a young painter and her escape methods, I was desperately, subconsciously, going through my own issues at home, as Caitlin did. At the time, I, as a child with bright eyes and a vivid imagination, was oblivious to what had just occurred over the past two summers. As I pressed the tip of my finger onto the keys, my surroundings pushed my ideas of my ten-page novel further and further, creating a

lifelike being inside the pages of Microsoft Word. It was as if I were playing piano music: with each stroke of a key, another emotion was revealed.

Only I had not yet learned how to read sheet music.

There was a day in which a man stood at our front door, donning a blue uniform. The man rang the bell. My mother was in her room. He rings again. My father walks up to the man who hands over a thick stack of papers and as my taller-than-average self could see, it was not the same bonded work which I had been reading while lying on the warm, green carpet of my loving families home. My father gave a look of dismay.

I had not known the meaning of divorce at that time. I knew it meant that I would have two Christmases, more toys, and two bedrooms. However, for my father and mother, that meant an empty house, and twice as much room on their beds. Divorce. Meanings of words are morphed by the way we walk up to them for the first time, as if you were meeting a new neighbor. A word's meaning is shaking the term's hand, and embracing him as if you had known the expression since dawn of time, recollecting current events. A new tie between your world and the word's is born.

The day before the 28<sup>th</sup> MTV Video Music Awards, two intricate signatures bear the surname of my own, forged in the darkest ink. The legal document, surrounded by bright flowers, seemed dull compared to the stained glass reflecting off of the pews; however, not even the luminescence of the architecture outbid the gem which lay bare on the frail fingertips of hers. As for my father, you would not be able to tell that a first band was ever molded onto his person before this date. A new hoop is formed over where the previous promise had lain. Since the day that I donned a purple dress and a bow in my hair, my father in a suit, signatures do not look as beautiful and the windows not as bright.

While the child that we call our president spoke of slurs and sexism, pre-election, I sat down in a chair. I remember it was a cold touch to the small of my back, just as it used to feel, as my bare knees pressed against the bottom of a desk. We were in Journalism class, looking at yearbooks similar to those I used to read while lying on the shaggy carpet, although now there were decades of them displayed on a shelf, side by side, chronologically. Each morning at precisely 9:21 AM, Monday through Friday, my subconscious would think back to the time I wrote of chocolate volcanoes and a young artist, except now I wrote about nonfictional characters, using their words instead of my own, in both works of newspapers and the yearbook. I wondered how many memories, how many human beings, how many faculty photographs were placed on each paper. I would go on to learn what was expected of me, and I would exceed the 250-word essays every thirty one days, and it was as if I were playing a piano once again, my fingers gliding smoothly across the keys.

Sports, Student Life, Entertainment, News, Editorial... the latter was what I preferred most, because I express myself explicitly through description and emotion while working at a computer; although since other's fingers glided across the keys more effortlessly than mine, I would not have the chance until my third year to do so. That would be when I would finally have learned to read sheet music. Being a Journalism reporter in my second year of the art, I documented life inside the school through newspaper and yearbook. I spoke out more of feminism, equal rights, and being a decent person in this messed up world, because Journalism allowed me to find my voice and build up who I believe myself to be.

I earned the title of Yearbook Editor months before I walked down the aisle, diploma in hand. Even before the academic year began, I was so excited to write that I began laying out the designs and ideas before I even knew my theme. That theme would end up being "You Are

Here,” speaking of how my hometown was very small and close-knit. I flipped from page to page, debating with my own conscience on how I would go about laying each design. I would show my team how to play the piano, pressing the keys with their fingertips, making a Beethoven melody into their own, which they would share with their peers, and those to come after them in the Journalism staff. Literacy played a key role in our mission of sharing our own stories with the rest of the students at Peotone High School, and it shows in the stack of layered papers, bonded together into one, complete nonfiction.

Today, I lay on my stomach, my belly pressed into the dull carpeting of what once I considered my childhood home; the difference is, instead of nine works, it is four. Five of those narratives are now shelved in a new home, which also houses my mother; instead of old text, it is new. The works of art I lay around me now have the faces and memories of people who are slightly younger or older than I, but they all can drive and become employed, yet none surpassing the age of legal drinking. My memory is not superb; however, I remember what I wrote, and while I cannot tell you how old I was or what specific date I began each stage of my literacy journey, I can recite specific key events from that time. This Yearbook, it is not mine only because most of the copies of my work of art are proudly displayed in my classmates’ dorm rooms or packed away in their childhood home. Those memories are still new— to myself and the peers who walked down the aisle with me on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018.