Running Head: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Autobiographical Essay

Bonnie Torgerson

Jonathan Lord

Foundations of Education, Fall 2013

Autobiographical Essay

I must be crazy! Who decides to go to college to become a teacher when they’re 50? The idea of touching the hearts and minds and lives of students to impact the world for generations is my motivation. I want to see children rise up to reach their full potential—the potential that is inherent in each one of us. I want to inspire students to imagine the possibilities of what their lives can be, and then make it a reality. How can I lead others unless I first travel this road of making a possibility a reality? As I survey my past—my education, work and service experience, I can see that all roads led me to this place. I have a passion to learn, a passion to teach, and more than that, I have a passion to help students know the truth of who they are and help them walk in that reality.

*Educational Background*

I began my education in first grade at Salmon Pioneer Elementary. Because my mother chose to go back to college to get her teaching degree when I started school, we moved to Dillon, Montana where I attended second and third grade. I know I was a good student but memories of school are a little fuzzy for these years. I remember a particular art class because the teacher played music as we created masterpieces. It was the first time a teacher had done this, and I enjoyed the song as it played. It felt like there was a freedom that would have been missing if the room were quiet. I love the idea of using unconventional methods to teach students.

Once my mother completed her degree, the family moved to Bigfork, Montana where I finished elementary school at Swan River. It was a small school and we were like a family. We played intramural sports like softball, soccer, basketball, and volleyball with other schools in the area. We had good teachers that cared about us and I truly learned. I loved to read and couldn’t wait for the bookmobile to come, bringing more adventures for me to dive into. I also loved spelling and competed in a county-wide bee in the eighth grade. The sense of belonging was important to me, and I know that’s something I intend to bring to the classes I teach.

I went on to high school in Bigfork and basically didn’t excel at much of anything. I was a good student and enjoyed learning, but I didn’t seem to fit in with the right crowd and I turned a corner where I wasn’t aware of my potential. I was fortunate to have several good teachers, but I don’t remember a specific teacher influencing me or inspiring me. I wish one of them would have talked to me about my prospects for the future. I had no plans of “becoming something” when I grew up. I hope to always inspire my students to consider all that is possible for them to achieve, and that no matter what, they are cared for and have a place in my classroom and in society that only they can fill.

Now as I begin this semester of college with the counsel of my advisor taking the Foundations and Field Experience classes first, I’m enjoying considering this career as a teacher and the options that are open before me. My love for learning and education are definitely a positive motivation in moving forward, and I can’t wait to share it with children!

*Work History*

I began working when I was thirteen and had summer jobs all through high school—mainly in restaurants. I learned about working in a timely manner, being responsible, and serving people. I am thankful for these qualities and know they will be valuable in the classroom.

After graduating from high school, I moved to Houston, Texas where my older sisters lived. I was not very serious about anything and worked at many jobs in restaurants, offices, and even did a stint in the toy department of J.C. Penney. I floundered as I still had no goals for my life, but I gained many skills in the process. I am resolved to encourage every child I come in contact with to step out, to try, and to get up when they fail and try again; to never just give up and let life “happen to them” but to walk with purpose and dignity.

I was living a pretty wild existence in those days, and never worked anywhere for more than a year until I was 27. It was then I got a job as Secretary to the National Service Manager for a Japanese heavy equipment company. I was really interested in computers and taught myself how to do word processing, publishing and more. I had a variety of duties and enjoyed the job, as it was not the same thing over and over. At the same time, it was a stressful environment with the cultural differences between the Japanese and American managers in each department. That, on top of the fact that I was basically doing the work of two people, led me to apply for another job. I am grateful for the ability to multi-task, wear different hats, and work with people of a different culture, and I trust it will serve others well.

I was hired by BMW of North America as a data entry clerk. Again, I found myself working with another culture, and observed the difference in how to approach people. The job paid well, gave me the opportunity to drive expensive German cars, and also travel a bit. While there, I taught myself how to create programs on the computer during my down time. After a couple of years, the company closed the port facility in Texas. Learning to work with a spirit of excellence and producing quality products was an important lesson I carried away from my time there, and I have been blessed to have that become a part of my character.

I got married just after the job ended at BMW and became a mother. During that time, I did various jobs to supplement our income—babysitting and keeping books for an attorney just to name a couple. Finding my purpose in being a mother gave me a more solid footing. More than just working for a paycheck, I felt a sense of direction that I hadn’t known before.

Our family moved to Montana where we bought a mailing and shipping business. I loved the variety of duties and providing excellent service to my customers. Although, managing employees was not my strong suit, I did enjoy owning and managing the business. I definitely learned a lot about people.We left Montana and began the adventure of living in an RV to be with my now ex-husband on the road as he was a commercial construction superintendent. My oldest son was a first grader and because of the travelling, I homeschooled him. It was then that I discovered my love for teaching. The reality of knowing I was the one who had the extreme privilege to guide him into learning how to read, write, and learn was so amazing!

Since that time I have not worked outside the home to speak of except to do some small book-keeping jobs. I know my diverse background in serving customers, working with different personalities and cultures, a strong work ethic, a sense of responsibility to serve and do my best will be an immense benefit as I become a teacher.

*Service and Extracurricular Activities*

My love of teaching led me to serve as a Sunday school teacher in many of the churches I’ve attended. I consider it a privilege to have taught some really important lessons to many children, including my own. The impact of what they learned and the decisions they made, even at a young age, will affect their lives for generations. I hope I will always provide that same inspiration no matter where I teach.

While my children attended a private Christian school in Salmon, I volunteered for several years as a teacher’s aide and worked with students in all subjects. I enjoyed the small classes and working with each child. It is always fascinating to me how each student learns and processes information and it was exciting to sometimes “unlock” the key to their learning style!

When my oldest son started high school, I was used to being a part of his education and didn’t want that to end. I volunteered one morning a week at the high school his freshmen year. My goal was not to assist in any of his classes, but to get to know the high school and the people he’d spend his day with. At the same time, I wanted to help teachers and other students. I really enjoyed working with the students who were struggling and giving them encouragement. For the past three years, I have been working with a group of women to open a pregnancy resource center in Salmon. Working with different personalities toward the same goal has been challenging, thrilling and frustrating. The center is now open and it is very rewarding knowing it is there to serve people in our community and give those help during a difficult time.

All of my service experiences involve teaching and/or giving people a reason to see what opportunities are in front of them. Since this is my goal as a teacher, I’m glad to see that I’ve already been doing that—even though I wasn’t always aware of it.

*Reasons for Choosing Education as a Career*

Although I never realized it until I started teaching, growing up with a mother who was a teacher had a tremendous influence on me. It just seemed to come naturally to me. As I worked with students, I would begin to understand how they process information. I remember one student in third grade who I thought was a poor reader. As I observed, I saw that she wouldn’t read until she could say the whole sentence out loud! I taught her how to take it word by word and her reading improved greatly.

The reality that I am the one responsible for teaching and guiding another human being in how to think for themself is overwhelming and thrilling! The very idea that at the end of the day, it’s not just dumping facts into brains, it’s about being part of the process of shaping the way a child views themselves, the world around them, and how they fit into that world. It is an awesome privilege to help students understand who they are, how they learn, and to consider what they can become.

A woman who works for the Idaho Department of Labor began doing a career fair a few years ago for the students sixth through twelfth grade in Salmon and surrounding towns. The first year, I took my two sons—dragging their feet, complaining, and saying how they weren’t going to college. They came out of the building talking a mile a minute about where they were going to go to college! Salmon has a lot of young people who don’t have any hopes or dreams for the future, and this seems like a great opportunity to open that door for them. I see the value of giving students a sense of direction—it’s my deepest desire as an educator.

*Professional Goals*

My immediate goal is to obtain my Bachelor’s Degree in Elementary Education at Northwest Nazarene University. I will complete the degree and student teaching by December of 2016. After obtaining my teaching degree, I will consider my employment options and go on from there.

I appreciate that all of my experiences—good and bad, make me who I am. As I look back at my education, work, and service experience, I can see how all of them have shaped and prepared me for the next step. I have struggled for many years to figure out where I fit in and what I am supposed to do. Because a large part of my life was spent without direction, I have a sense of purpose to not only reach my goals, but to help others find their way as well. I see that I have always been learning, and I have always been teaching. Although I’m getting a late start, I’m moving forward to realize my dream of becoming a teacher; of truly making a difference one life at a time, and it doesn’t seem so crazy after all.