

## Thank You for Seeing What I Did Not

23 years, the combined number of years my parents, both doctors, spent in school after college. Masters degrees, medical school, residencies, and fellowships filled two decades of their lives--a comprehensive education to which my parents attribute a great deal of their success. My parents actively prioritized education, not just for themselves, but for me and my siblings, but our educational course changed when we moved to South Carolina. We moved from Florida where I was enrolled in a Montessori program. Not only did my new hometown lack the Montessori education my parents sought to provide, but the state also boasts a lousy last place for public education. When it came time to move here, my parents vowed to provide me with the best education possible--college prep school...

For the first 11 years of my life, I was fortunate to have two united supporters in my educational endeavors, my parents--both emotionally and financially. They were both essential, although their efforts differed significantly. In June 2014, this unification ended with my parents' divorce. Along with the ending of this unification came the uncertainty of a promise made 6 years prior, access to quality education. At this point, my education was the only thing that had remained stable in my life.

That changes on September 7th, 2014, I woke in the early hours of the morning to my mom saying, "Come on, William, it is time to say goodbye." Still in a stupor from my lack of sleep, I struggled to pull myself out of the bed, down the stairs, and into the living room where my father lay, taking his final breaths. I stood there, by his bed, trying to understand the magnitude of what I was doing: I was permanently saying goodbye. Goodbye to my father, my role model, my advocate for education.

My father had succumbed to his diagnosis of Pancreatic Cancer. In a strange and overly complicated circumstance, my supporters became united for one last time, lasting only a few days before my father passed. Even though my parents were divorced, my father had come home to live with us a week before he passed.

Along with having to deal with the grief of my father's passing, my family had to deal with knowing that the future of our education was uncertain. One of my advocates was no longer present. In a novel way of viewing education, Deborah Brandt names anyone "who enables, supports, teaches, ... suppresses, or withholds literacy" as sponsors of literacy (Brandt 169). Rather than using the word "team," I will follow in the footsteps of Deborah Brandt and classify my "supporters" as my "sponsors". In her theory, Brandt insists on the presence of an ideological freight, or a reason for wanting to instill education. When mentioning education, I am referring to the facets of both literacy and writing. Brandt asserts that the relationship of the sponsorship is not one-sided, and that, "Sponsors... gain an advantage by it in some way" (Brandt 166).

My father's sponsorship of my education came from more of a financial aspect, rather than physical support. Occasionally, he would take me to school. Although the number of rides he gave was far and few between, they always ended the same way, down to the last sentence, "Get my money's worth!" The similarity of each car ride allows me to easily recall what occurred. We enter the prep school through the front gates in a black Lincoln. The interior of the car is one I will never forget. From underneath the beige captain's chair, the sour, nearly putrid smell of the uneaten bagel that I hid a week ago pervades my nose. Fighting against this smell was my father's sweet smell of his cologne. The plushness of the car's seats provided the best naps before school, my chin snapping against my chest, reminding me that I was merely minutes away from exiting the warm confines of the car. I would wake to the car door being opened for

me by my elementary school teachers, and as I gathered my things to exit the car, my dad would always say: “Get my money’s worth.”

To the untrained ear, one might wonder what that statement means. In fact, when I was younger, I myself wondered what exactly my dad meant and what me going to school had to do with his money. After all, what does a kid know about money and the value of education? Well, I quickly learned the value of the two in the wake of my father’s death when the possibility of continuing my education at Augusta Prep was threatened due to the financial hardship brought about by his death. Suddenly, his quote took on a new meaning--always do your best and exhaust every educational resource you have at your disposal. If my dad would spend so much on school, the least I could do was put forth my best effort in all of my endeavors.

While my father’s educational support was mostly relegated to the financial aspect, my mother’s support in my education journey has been emotional. Let me be clear, her support, guidance, attention, and care have been unwavering and I would not be the person I am without her. Growing up in a single-parent household where meat once per week and powdered milk was all they could afford, my mother has consistently strived to provide a better life for me. She transformed her life and took control over her circumstances through education which is why she has been such a staunch supporter of my own education. Growing up, my mother’s access to quality education was practically nonexistent. In fact, during her senior year of high school, her guidance counselor encouraged her not to waste the money on the application for college. She toyed with the idea of becoming a hairdresser, but with her grandfather’s encouragement, she ended up pursuing nursing at the University of Miami--an opportunity she was only afforded as a result of her mother’s employment with the school.

My mom's commitment to education and learning has been at the forefront for as long as I can remember. From kinder music as babies, to Montessori as toddlers, my mom has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure that I had access to the tools to equip myself for success in both the classroom and the real world. I remember an experience with my mom that displayed to me the importance she placed on literacy. On a warm afternoon, we decided to go shopping and stopped at Barnes and Noble. Immediately, our faces were met with the cool storefront air, and our noses were met with that uniquely robust smell of fresh books. After perusing the endless aisles of children's books, I made my selections. As we neared the counter, I stood on my tiptoes to place the books I was going to purchase. When I reached into my pockets to grab my birthday money to pay for the books, my mom said, "I may not buy you every toy you want, but I will always buy you any book you want. No one can ever take your education from you." Initially, I was confused as to why my mom made this promise. What could make reading and writing so important to her that she would promise to pay for me? After seeing how much of a positive impact a quality education had on her life, I began to understand why education was so important to her: it gave her access to things she would never have had without it. She wanted to instill this same thirst and desire for knowledge in me too. By assuring me that books would always be covered, she was assuring me that she would not let finances get in the way of my education.

Though time has passed and life has significantly changed since my first foray into the classroom, my sponsors' goals and wishes for me remained the same. They wanted to provide me with the best opportunities for me to succeed. My mom continues to be a pillar of support and encouragement - a role that has adapted over the years, but never wavered. My father is no longer here and will have been absent for the majority of my educational journey, but his

espousal of educational rigor and demands for academic excellence continue to motivate me, even to this day.

Deborah Brandt coins the term “ideological freight” for the ulterior motives that sponsors hold. She offers a unique comparison, saying, “Like Little Leaguers who wear the logo of a local insurance agency on their uniforms...people throughout history have acquired literacy pragmatically under the banner of others’ causes.” (Brandt 168) As for my sponsors, their motivations were to provide me with a better childhood than theirs. Both of my sponsors had a firsthand account of the extent that education can affect people’s lives. My parents wanted to give me as many opportunities as possible. According to them, it was my job to take advantage of the opportunities they had given me, as they were not going to do it for me. Their job was completed by offering me the opportunities. On the receiving end, my sponsors gained the satisfaction of knowing that they provided me with the best education and watching me succeed.

Reflecting back, I realized how much my sponsors initially depended on each other. If one sponsor were not there, the other would not have been able to promote my education. If my father had passed earlier or not been my financial sponsor, I would not have had access to such quality education. If my mother had not been there or not been my physical sponsor, I would have had the access to education, but I would not have known how to take advantage of the opportunities provided to me. My sponsors taught me to be an active consumer of my education, and I would not choose to have it any other way.

Dear Reader,

The purpose of this paper is to describe and explain the effects my parents, my sponsors, had on my literacy and education. I hope after reading this letter you understand the positive and negative effects sponsors can have on people's literacy, especially mine. I see those questioning the importance of education as my intended audience.

Reflecting back to those 2-3 key memories refreshed my "thirst for knowledge" and again reminded me of why I am here. I hope that my essay serves as a reminder of the importance of education, both to me, but to the readers too. I feel that my key memories are the strengths of my paper. From the memories, I go on to explain their importance throughout my educational career. I really enjoyed the synthesis of the memories and their effects on my educational journey.

On the other hand, I wish I could have done a better job of making a more seamless introduction to Deborah Brandt's points. I enjoyed incorporating her points into my paper as I agreed with them, but I could not find a simple way to do so. During peer review, I noticed that some of my concepts were unclear and I had the opportunity to expand on my imagery. I also noticed uses of incorrect grammar and differing verb tenses. If I had more time to revise, I would find an easier way to include Brandt and also include more of her points. The primary item in this paper that affects how I feel about it is the clarity of what I am trying to connect. I hope that the reader will be able to understand my sponsors' ties to Deborah Brandt.

I hope you enjoyed reading.

Sincerely

## Works Cited

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