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Life: How It Changed Me to Who I Am Today

By Ethan Guttermann

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Tragedy, a teacher, and a role model. The role model changed my life, the tragedy changed my thinking, and the high school teacher changed my view on English, but all these changed my view on writing. So many things can change the way a person thinks, writers, or communicates, and that is what happened to me. With all of my sponsors of literacy, my entire view on writing was changed for the better.

I was only ten years old, and I thought I was going to lose my best friend. Cancer struck my mother, and I thought it was all over from there. August 31, 2009, my mom found out she had breast cancer. I remember her telling me this news only a couple of hours after she found out, and my life was instantly changed forever. I instantly began doing research on the cancer, but was soon stopped due to my uncle's birthday party I had that night. The days had gone past, and I knew that the cancer could only get worse before it got better. I started to notice my mom wasn't home as much, and then found out that when she wasn't home, she was in the hospital. I didn't know what to think when someone would ask me, "Where is your mom?" All I knew to think was, "She is in the hospital battling one of the worst things that can happen to a human being; cancer."

Days passed, and the cancer got stronger, but so did my mom. I also was getting stronger. I started writing my ideas down on how my mom could get better, and I started talking to the teachers at my school as to why I was so upset all the time. When I would meet with the teachers, it helped me become a better writer because they were able to critique me in ways that I didn't know were possible!

The only good thing to come out of the cancer was, my mom was getting stronger not only mentally/physically, but as a person. My mom was teaching me more life skills that I needed to know, and my mom was teaching me how to interpret different things, and teaching me different writing techniques when I would write down my research on her cancer. While she was teaching me these things, it was able to make me write better, and elaborate more on my thoughts while writing. Without my mom teaching me those very important techniques, and skills, I do not think I would be a good writer today.

Radiation lasted for seven long weeks. During these seven weeks, I noticed that the house seemed sad all the time, and I was going to change this! I started talking to my family about everything, and I noticed my mom and dad arguing more and more. I knew this was not a time for arguing so I finally just asked them to stop, and they did, for me. After radiation, came the lumpectomy on December 18, 2009. Mom had finally come away with defeating breast cancer. To this day, I remember mom telling me she had defeat cancer, and I just bawled. The strongest woman I know, had just become even stronger.

The tragedy of breast cancer striking my mother honestly shaped my thinking on life. It made me think, "Someone else is always going to have it worse than I do." With this thinking, it made be an "elaborator," it made me dive deeper into the matter, and it made me learn to love things/people more. My mother's cancer also made me a better writer in the sense that I was elaborating more now. I would say that my mother's cancer is one of my sponsors of writing due

to the influence that it had on my life. Cancer can change the way so many people think and write, and I can say that it did change the way I think and write.

In eighth grade, my English teacher was Ms. Joyce Coats-Whitworth. She started off the first day of class by telling us the story of how she threw her wedding ring off the Golden Gate Bridge. I instantly thought she was lying, but then she dove deeper into the story. She had explained how her and husband never had a good marriage, and when she wanted the divorce, she was going to get it no matter what. Ms. Whitworth would change my life from that moment on. I had instantly opened to her and told her about the breast cancer my mom had recently beaten, and I had told her about my parents' divorce that followed. She had asked me to write a paper about all of this, but in the end, that never happened due to us always getting carried away in conversation. To this day, I wish I would've written that paper only because I knew Ms. Whitworth would've made it one of the best papers I ever wrote. Ms. Whitworth would have to be another sponsor of literacy to me due to the influence and impact that she had on my writing during eighth grade English.

Ms. Whitworth and I spent countless hours talking about the tragedy that occurred, and we talked about how to get through life looking mainly at the good times, and not the bad times. I relate my story with Ms. Whitworth to a story like Joe Dombrowski's. Mr. Dombrowski is a fourth-grade teacher from Royal Oak, Michigan that recently became famous by giving his students a fake spelling quiz on April Fool's Day. Dombrowski appeared on the Ellen Show, and became an even bigger hit after that. Dombrowski said, "My philosophy with teaching is that you have to make the educational experience fun and engaging." (Rokas par. 1) Dombrowski and Whitworth are closely related as Whitworth made my educational experience fun and engaging, and Dombrowski is also doing that for his students. Dombrowski and Whitworth are also closely related as they both have challenged their students to find the true meaning of things, and then write it down. With Ms. Whitworth having us, the students, find the true meaning and write it down, it really helped to become the writer that I am today.

Ms. Whitworth announced her retirement during the middle of my eighth-grade year, and I was devastated! Even though I would not be able to have Whitworth as a teacher again, I wanted other students to be able to experience the life change that I did. Ms. Whitworth taught me so much in 180 days, that I still ask her for advice to this day when it comes to multiple things. I recall doing a project over *Romeo and Juliet* where Whitworth had us act out the play, but she did it in a different way. She had the girls play guy roles, and the guys play girl roles. She later explained the reason she did this was to show us that it was okay to be different at times. She also wanted to write down all the differences that we say and as a class, we came up with over 100 differences. She wanted us students to realize that not everyone was the same. I think by Ms. Whitworth teaching me to see that everyone is not the same, impacted my writing very heavily for the better. Now, when I write, I always think, "Not everyone is going to have the same ideas as me, so it is okay to be different in my papers." I also now see the bigger picture in writing. I see writing as a way to share a story, and to share a message, and hopefully have a good impact on the readers life.

My role model, Steve Jobs, would also make a huge impact on my life. Steve Jobs would announce that he had pancreatic cancer in 2004. Jobs didn't let this get to him, and did not let it affect his company, Apple. I founded Jobs and Apple in 2007 when the original iPhone came out, and became a follower from there. It was what Steve Jobs reiterated in his 2007 keynote for the iPhone that made me want to be a part of the Apple ecosystem, and a part of the Steve Jobs

era. Jobs said, “Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.” When I heard Jobs say this during the keynote, my thinking would change for the better once again. I would focus on the bigger picture, and I would one day hope to change the world as he did right then and there.

I relate the cancer that Jobs had to the cancer that my mom did. My mom had breast cancer, and Jobs had pancreatic cancer. When I found out Jobs had cancer, when I started following Apple, in 2007, my mind would change on a lot of things. This was one of the first instances where I had really heard of someone having cancer, and then 2009 came. My mom got cancer, and I relate Jobs not giving up to my mom never giving up. I remember my mom and I talking about how Steve Jobs acted. Yes, I literally said, “WWJD” meaning, “What Would Jobs Do?” I remember asking my mom my mom “WWJD” and all she said was, “Not give up.”

When Jobs passed away, in 2011, I was devastated. My role model had passed away! I didn’t know what to think when Jobs had died. He had announced a brand-new iPhone the day before he died, and now the world was changed. I was changed. I instantly started to dive deeper and deeper into thinking, and now most people would say I “overthink” many things. With Jobs last words being, “Oh Wow.”, I wanted these to be the words of many people when it came to things that I do. I want people to be able to see the bigger picture like I do, and get to that point where they can think “Oh Wow.” Also with Jobs passing, it made me want to write more. It made me want to write stories that I recall about my childhood in case a tragedy happened to me in my lifetime. I feel like if I were to have started writing those stories around the time Jobs died, I would have been a better writer for the better.

When I was first able to get my hands on the iPhone on January 9, 2007, this really changed the way I wrote, and communicated with the world. I was not able to type out my papers on my iPhone instead of writing them down, and I was now able to take notes better than ever! I credit the iPhone to changing my entire note taking process, and the way I communicated my thoughts! Without the iPhone, I don’t think I would have ever changed the way I wrote. I think having the iPhone as one of my sponsors of literacy really changed my writing for the better.

A role model, a high school teacher, and a tragedy. All of these things changed my thinking, and ways of life in many ways, but I have to thank them. Without Jobs, Ms. Whitworth, and my mom’s battle with cancer, I would not be the person I am today. I would not be the writer that I am today, and I would not be listener that I am today as well. I also would not be able to dive deeper into thinking, be the “elaborator” that I am, and not have people tell me to stop overthinking! With thanking the people above, I really hope that the message of “dive deeper into thinking” came across. Without these people, and the stories that come with them, I would not be here today writing like I am today.

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