

Lost Youth: The Forgotten Ones

A Personal Journey of Awareness & the Need to Advocate

by

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D'Wanna Douglass

Introduction

The requirement of this essay is to write about a topic of interest related to my studies at Kent State University. The following essay describes how youth through resilience and the ability to make choices for themselves are able to realize their own personal goals and achievements and how I personally did the same. This essay will also show how, through the ability to make choices, I have decided to continue to advocate for struggling youth by giving them the opportunity to explore their emotions by providing an outlet for self-expression through art. The only way to explain this journey with any kind of reasoning is to go back to the beginning and explain why I made the choices I did, even though understanding came much later.

Chapter One

The first few years...

Either because of a lack of care or simply as a result of life itself, when I was born I was sick quite often and spent a lot of time in the hospital with repeated bouts of pneumonia. Because of these absences and a probable lack of bonding with my birth mother, my life began being raised by many but wanted by none. I remember little time spent with my birth mother. What I lacked as a child was the ability to bond with my birth mother. This lack of bonding is technically described by Attachment Theory, which states that there should be a secure attachment between an infant and its mother (Arnett, 2013).

I remember spending lots of time with various people from the church. When I was around a year old, I fell down the stairs, or so the story goes, and broke my leg. The type of fracture I had did not match the type of fall. After investigating, my grandmother started filing petitions to the court to take me away from my mother. She was successful, I was ordered by the court to live with her as a foster child.

As far back as 1838, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the right of the parent is not inalienable (*Ex Parte Crouse* 1838), meaning that the child has specific rights of protection and care, that a parent cannot take away those rights just because he or she

is the parent. The government set standards and specific measures for childcare that all parents are to be held accountable for. Children may be taken away from their parents if the state determines that the caretaker has failed to protect and care for the child.

Signs of neglect include:

Dehydration

Malnutrition

Untreated bedsores

Untreated health problems or conditions

Unsanitary living conditions

Failure to thrive

Abandonment

Death

(Gosselin, 2010).

There are four subcategories of neglect. They are:

Educational: Children must attend school until the age of 16. Failure to enroll a child in school; chronic truancy; failure to educate because of a special educational need (Goldman et al., 2003)

Emotional Neglect: Exposure to chronic or intimate partner violence. Permitting the use of drugs or alcohol. Delay in psychological care (Goldman et al., 2003).

Medical Neglect: Withholding medically necessary treatment or denying medical or mental health treatment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2007b).

Physical Neglect: Failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, protection or supervision. Child abandonment (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2007b).

Though cared for and loved by my grandparents, I began to have an awareness of being a burden. After about a year or so my grandfather died, but at the time I only knew he went out to the garden, fell down, and was taken away, never to return. Being young I just knew he went away, not that he had had a heart attack and died in the yard.

Life as a child then was good. I remember one time my grandmother let me get up on the counter so she could pour me a saucer full of milk as I was pretending to be a kitten. I'm sure financially it was a different story, since my various cousins would come and stay with us for a while and then leave again. I'm sure financially things were stressful for her, but I never knew it. My cousins and I were always treated with love and affection. When I was almost three, I remember my grandmother lying on the couch one day; I was scared because I had never seen her do that before. Soon people came and took her away, and she never returned. I never found out what happened to her until this year. She had died in surgery from a brain tumor. All I knew was that if you cared about someone, they eventually would leave.

Why am I telling you all this? Because a pattern had begun. Many adolescents' lives are affected by circumstances and the poor choices of the adults around them, just as mine was, and these adolescents will also have to make their own choices, to adapt regardless of the directions they are pulled in without their permission, without being able to have a say. I am too young still at this point to recognize that my immediate goal is to spend my life trying to avoid being a stereotype, yet being one anyway.

Changes...

After they took my grandmother away, a tall man came to me and said "You need to come with me; you are going to live with us now." I got in his big car and sat on the back seat, with my feet sticking straight out, because I wasn't big enough for my feet to touch the floor. I couldn't see out of the car window, as it was up too high. I felt as if I was in a box. No one spoke to me and I was scared.

Being little and unaware, I did not know I was now living with my Uncle and Aunt and their four children.

Obligation played a huge part in their accepting me into their household. Awareness of not belonging and being different was immediate, I just didn't know why. I know feeding me was troublesome as I would only eat jelly toast and canned spaghetti. My new brothers and I played well together. My youngest brother was eight months younger than I, and we immediately were best friends. My older brother was nice to me

as well. One of my new older sisters told me later when I was in the first or second grade that I didn't belong, that those I thought were my actual parents were not, I wasn't wanted and she would make sure someday to get rid of me. Little did I know then, but her prophesy would come true.

Additional moments of being different and not wanted occurred when the family went on long vacations to Chataqua Lake for weeks in the summer, but I was not allowed to go. I stayed with another Aunt and Uncle who had a farm. Staying with them was fun, as I got to play with their boys and ran around the farm. They used to be one of the grape suppliers for Welch's. Or I stayed with my new maternal grandparents, who always treated me well but were older and had no children at home.

When I was old enough to question being left behind, I asked my new grandmother why they didn't they let me go on vacation with them? Was I bad? The questioning must have worked, because suddenly I was allowed to go with them on vacation. However, if I had to go to the bathroom on the trip, I was told no. Many of those trips were very painful, I as I didn't want to wet my pants and I didn't want to be left behind if they decided I was too much of a problem to deal with.

Little things started happening as I grew older, but I still considered them my parents, because that's who they were in my mind. In the third grade I missed the school bus. I remember getting in trouble with my new mother who had to pick me up at school. She yelled and screamed at me about how inconsiderate I was, how I was

wasting her time to have to come and get me, and if I missed the bus again, I was not to call but to walk home. Sadly enough I did miss the bus again, because putting on snow clothes and boots is difficult enough as a third grader without hurrying to get the bus too. I walked home. I knew better than to call for a ride. I'm not quite sure how I managed to get out of the school unattended, but I needed to walk approximately a mile through snow banks that were way over my head. Remember, I was only in the third grade. Street crews that plowed Route 20 made really high snow banks on the sides of the road, and there were no sidewalks. I would sink down into the snow banks that were over my head, and it was a struggle to climb back out of them. Eventually I was so tired I lay down in the snow beside the road hoping someone would stop and rescue me and give me a ride home. No one did. Thank God! I eventually got up and made my way home. Nothing was ever said to me about being late home from school, or why I wasn't on the bus. Nothing.

Emotional Abuse includes excessive, aggressive and or unreasonable parental behavior that places demands on a child to perform beyond his or her capabilities.

Emotional Abuse is not what a parent does, but what a parent fails to do. A child who receives no love, no care, no support, and no guidance will carry the scars into adulthood (Child Trends, 2008).

Shortly after that, in the summertime my new father's job with Union Carbide transferred him to the state of Connecticut. My new father left first to get us a new

home, then my new mother moved with the other kids and I stayed home with my new father in Ohio, then we moved as well.

Chapter Two

Who am I?

Time passes and though life wasn't bad, the awareness of being different continued, this mostly occurred when I was with my new mother and the mean older sister. Once I was specifically told not to call her mommy; if I wanted, I could call her mom. I remember thinking, what else would I call you? Isn't that your name? My mean sister immediately called her mommy and got a hug, even though my mean sister was way too old to be calling her mommy.

When we started at our new church, I was introduced not as a daughter but as a foster child. I honestly didn't know what that meant; just that everyone was looking at me. Years later when I thought about the incident, I realized that there was no reason for this claim/statement of separation. She just cleanly separated herself from me. If I had been more aware of the undercurrents, I might have been prepared for what happened later, that all was not well.

Identity

I had always known that I was the different one in the family, but I didn't know why. The first formal statement had been from my mean sister, but I didn't know what she was really talking about, I just knew she was mean. The second formal statement by my new mother was that I had to call her something else instead of mommy like the other kids. The third time was the introduction of me to strangers with an actual title of foster child. This last one occurred during my adolescent years, when one starts to question themselves, who they are, are they a good person or a bad person? What's wrong with me? The beginning of forming one's own identity, the formation and alteration of self-esteem and self-reflection, occurs at this stage in life. What are my cultural beliefs? I knew my symbolic inheritance was that I was raised in the church, that I was a Christian. I understood the roles and the behaviors that were expected of me in that aspect of my life, but I did not know who I was, both literally and figuratively.

Socialization

Socialization occurs at this time as well. Socialization is acquiring the behaviors and beliefs of the culture one lives in (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). The important outcomes of socialization are as follows:

Self- Regulation: Acquiring self-control to restrain one's impulses and to fit into the social norms.

Role Preparation: Preparation for occupational roles, gender roles, marriage and parenthood.

Sources of Meaning: Learn what is important, what is valued, what is to be lived for.

What I lacked was the formation of the independent self. I did not know what my place was in the family. I know now that my new family also had to adjust to me personally as a new member of the family, that they too went through a period of disequilibrium. Some adjusted and others did not.

A change in direction

What we call child abuse now or neglect occurred often once we left Ohio and the secure arms of my new mother's family. I have heard that a life-altering moment can change a person's behavior. Looking back now with more knowledge than I had when I was experiencing it, I think the separation from family changed my new mom, at least towards me, and no it wasn't for the better.

I was in elementary school at the time. I just remember whether I misbehaved either by accident or just because I wasn't really hers, I always received the harshest of punishments. For example, my first hair brush beating was because one day at school I accidentally threw my baton up on the roof during recess. I would get it back the next day, but because I came home without it, I was beaten with a hair brush for being

irresponsible. Another time I traded my play portable hair dryer for a doll. I was made to go to my friend's house and ask for it back. When I got home I was spanked with a yardstick, and when that broke, she used the hair brush instead. I'm not sure if my new father knew about the mistreatments. I never said anything to him and he always treated me the same. Not with loving, as a parent should, not with indifference, just neutrally. But I do believe he tried.

Upon reflection I do remember him complementing me, and bragging once to his friends about my diving skills.

Many times I was allowed to go by myself to a pond way up in the woods alone to ice skate, unsupervised. When common sense evolved as I grew up, I often wondered if she was just plain unaware of the dangers in the world to young girls wandering about by themselves through mountain trails and old roads, much less the danger of ice skating on a pond that often was not frozen completely alone. Or if she was hoping I just wouldn't come back. Then she could play the martyr, about how difficult it was to raise another woman's child. I guess I will never know.

In the sixth grade the chores started. No one else had chores, with the exception of keeping their room clean. I mowed the lawn, weeded the landscaping, cleaned house, and washed dishes by hand, even though there was a dishwasher. Television was strictly monitored. I had to be in bed by 9 p.m. and the only program I could watch was the *Walton's* or something similar. When we were sick, we were allowed to have a

portable TV in our bedroom, so we would stay in bed. On rare occasions of being able to watch TV, I saw *The Wizard of Oz*, so while I washed the dishes I used to sing in my head the various songs from that movie, usually the ones about the wicked witch and how she was going to come get me. Doing that made the washing of dishes go quickly! I ironed as well, everything from sheets to hankies, pillowcases, shirts etc. . . To this day I still avoid irons!

I remember once when it was my birthday, every child before me always had their Happy Birthdays said at breakfast, but when my turn came, no one said a word and I spent all day wondering what I did, why no one said happy birthday. I remember being afraid to mention them forgetting, so I didn't. At dinner that night my new mother said "sorry, I forgot." Happy Birthdays were said. It sounds simple and childish, but I remember the day vividly and I still remember the disappointment.

Various things set me off even today, and I am immediately a child, looking around and panicking. I still to this day get afraid when I get separated from my husband when we are shopping or traveling. Even though I know he loves me and I love him, somewhere in the back of my mind I expect to be left and or abandoned, which offends him, because he always says, "I wouldn't do that!" Early learned behavior, though altered by choice, still lurks deep within.

Learned Behavior is being afraid or experiencing other emotional responses to current life events that are caused by past experiences in life, which then cause a

conditioned response. People are made up of both learned behaviors and inherited traits, such as physical traits, genetic traits etc. . . . Some aspects of learned behavior can be altered by conditioning. For example, when a fear of abandonment is met consistently with the fact that you were not abandoned this time, the learned behavior will start to diminish (DeLuccia- Reinstein, 2013). Fear of Abandonment is also related to the Attachment Theory. While Attachment Theory is a biological bond with a caregiver, this attachment is essential to the mental construction that forms the basis of personality (Friedrich, 2002).

There are four categories of Attachment Behavior:

Secure Attachment: A child is easily comforted, and moves freely from the caregiver to a stranger

Resistant: An anxious child resists comfort and separation at times from the caregiver

Avoidant: The child tends to avoid parents or caregivers and does not care who cares for him or her. This attachment style can be the result of an abusive or neglectful parent.

Disorganized: The child is erratic. Confused behavior is based on an inability to determine which behaviors gain favorable attention. Children who are raised by neglectful parents develop insecure attachments, both in future relationships and with their own parenting styles as well (Gosselin, 2010).

I think I was a combination of two of these attachment behaviors. Avoidant, because I was shuffled around a lot when I was little from grandparents to aunts and uncles to the ladies of the church, so it didn't matter who I was with at the time, which also explains why I blindly just got into the car with my uncle after they took my grandmother away. I also think in some ways I was disorganized, because I never knew what would please my then-new parents. When I got married, I also felt insecure in our new attachment at first.

Chapter Three

Temporary Reprieves

When I was in the sixth grade, I was considered old enough to be shipped off for the summers. I was always sent away to church camps and for a while for me it was fun, even though I knew it was just to get me out of the house for a while. The ability to play and have fun with other kids my own age was awesome. My mean sister had married by then and I was sent to spend summers with her and her husband who, thankfully, was nice and friendly and a minister. He was in charge of many of the church camps, so I spent the summers with them and went to the church camps where he was in charge. To my joy, once at camp I was forgotten by my sister to my joy and life was normal. Traveling to these camps over the years was an eye-opening experience. I was either flown, or bussed, or put on a train, alone. Let me tell you, being put on a train at the age of thirteen that required a change at Grand Central Station was very scary! So was riding in busses at night, with strangers getting on and off the bus!

Arriving at my mean sister's house, we would then travel by a moving van to the camp. Because there was not enough room in the cab, I was placed in the back where the furniture was, with the door propped open approx. six inches. I'm sure I probably

scared many a traveler, because I would stick my hand out from under the door just to feel the air move, now and then, and to get relief from the exhaust.

These summer camp exiles continued for several years until the year boys started flirting with me. I honest to God believe what happened next was a combination of events. Having given birth to one child, my mean sister was now very overweight, and I believe she was jealous of me. Combined with her earlier hatred of me being the interloper, this laid the ground for her future behavior and the changing of my own life's course.

Needless to say, my first kiss occurred at one of the church camps. I knew my sister had found out about the kiss, but she just looked at me and didn't say anything. More than likely this is when she started planning my exile. When camp ended, instead of riding in the truck storage area once again, I traveled back with one of the religious singer's friends. I'm not really sure of the relationship, but she was a stranger to me, nevertheless. Approximately halfway into the trip, she pulled over and said, "I'm beat. You drive." I looked at her in astonishment and said, "What? I'm only thirteen, I don't know how!" She said, "That's okay, stay between the lines and everything will be fine." She promptly went to sleep! So, driving slowly I started my first experience with driving! By the way, I was in Pennsylvania at the time and their roads are curvy and scary. Having to drive through tunnels in mountains was nauseating, to put it mildly! This woman eventually woke up and seemed surprised by how little distance we had

traveled, and she drove the rest of the way back! Since I hadn't driven much over forty mph, I'm surprised I wasn't pulled over by the police, much less managed not to wreck the car!

Life-Changing Moment

The house in Connecticut had a pool. It was my responsibility to clean (vacuum), skim leaves and get the live and dead animals out of it, as well as to chemically maintain it. I liked doing that chore! After a camp trip, I was swimming when my new father called me over. I went over to see what he wanted, He seemed hesitant and then out of the blue said, "Due to your recent behavior at camp, your mother, . . . umm we have decided you need to make a choice." I must have looked perplexed, because he then said "Your mother has decided that she is not willing to go through the boy stage with you. So, your choices are: 1. Go live in the state children's home, or 2. Live with Aunt so & so." I certainly didn't want to live in the children's home, so I selected my Aunt. I didn't really know her, since she lived in Ohio. I never cried or asked why. I just went, as if it were a normal event. I never, ever really knew what my mean sister had said regarding my supposed misbehavior, but I think it involved my getting kissed by a boy. My mean sister's jealousy and previous hatred led her to lying and making up some type of story. In the end I was dismissed and discarded like yesterday's newspaper. I also never knew what was said to my siblings/cousins that allowed them to end all contact

with me. I do digress: My older brother wrote to me a couple times and sent me Rolf, a stuffed animal from Sesame Street, to remember him by, as he played the piano too! In hind sight, I think our ages interfered with a continued relationship. He was older and had a new emerging relationship, and I was a teenager, living far away, and didn't understand what had happened and had a new life to build. Also, my oldest sister, who didn't live at home for long while I was there, came to stand up for me when I got married. I spoke with my father several times as well. Until this point, even though there were issues, I truly believed that they were my family. I guess I was wrong. My living there evidently was a temporary solution, and I guess I was easily forgotten.

Chapter Four

A New Life

I traveled to Ohio and moved in with my aunt and her two older children and her estranged husband, who still lived there. After registering me with Children's Services, my aunt took me shopping for school clothes and I got to select my own clothes for the first time ever. I was fifteen and I used to have to wear dresses three days a week and pants two days a week during the school year. So this ability to have choices was exhilarating! I now lived as a basically normal teenager, with normal responsibilities in the household. I was trusted. I walked everywhere, participated in varsity sports, was in the band, and had my first birthday party (sweet sixteen). Normal.

The next step

Then I met my husband-to-be. Boy, did my Aunt balk at my wanting to hang out with him! She said, any man of his age (twenty-two) was only interested in one thing! Her rule before we could date was that he had to come to the house and spend some time there so she could get to know him. To her surprise, he had no problem with that! Eventually we were given permission to date! On our first date, he asked for permission

to kiss me! Love came quickly. No, not sex, love, someone of my own. He showed his love quickly and completely. I showed mine more slowly, since with history, if I cared, then he, like everyone else, would leave. So I held back some. Oh, we did what young people in love do, to a point. We never took that final step until he showed me the engagement ring he had bought me! Which I still have to this day!

So, although my getting kicked out of the family was patiently planned by my then mean sister, for years the plan went awry, getting me out of an uneasy household to a place where I was trusted and cared for by my aunt. To eventually meet and marry my husband, and have wonderful children of my own, and grandchildren, I must thank you, my dear mean sister, profusely! Thank you, Thank you, and Thank you for making my life better! By the way, my husband was my first and only, and I am eternally grateful for whatever lies you told to get me kicked out! I would have liked to keep in touch with some of my then family. But it is what it is.

Marriage

I wanted a family of our own, but my being a minor and a ward of the court/state made that an impossible wish until I was eighteen. So we became pregnant and got married shortly after I turned seventeen. My ward of the court/state status was cancelled then as well, as my new husband's family had a friend who was a judge!

If you remember from earlier in this paper, my maternal grandparents petitioned for me to be taken away from my mother, and they won. But by doing this, I became a ward of the state until I reached the age of eighteen, as they (the state) assumed responsibility for me until I was adopted, which I never was. I had asked once why my Aunt and Uncle didn't adopt me; I was told that my birth mother wouldn't sign the adoption papers. I know now that was a lie, as I was a ward of the court, so the court would have signed the papers. My birth mother had lost her parental rights and had no say.

Stereotype

Becoming and recognizing that I was a stereotype was difficult, but it drove me to be more aware of what was happening to me, to behave and succeed and to be the best I could be and to prove everyone wrong who said I would fail. The stereotypes were basic.

I was abused, neglected and emotionally abused, plus I grew up in the system, so I would never amount to much.

I married young . . . that would never last.

Teenage Pregnancy . . . there was no way I would ever be a good mother.

I was abused and neglected, and young, so statistically, I would then become an abuser myself.

Stereotype . . . Stereotype . . . Stereotype

New Possibilities

Any new marriage is difficult. You have to learn to live together, discover likes and dislikes, grow up, be mature, a difficult task, as well as get used to another person in your life. I'm sure I was a pain and I thank God my husband was more mature and full of love for me to tolerate everything I'm sure I was full of! He made me grow up quickly. One day when being upset about something and immature, I tried to hand him back my ring, he looked at me and said calmly, "You need to make a choice, and you need to make it now, because if you give me that ring now, you will never get it back." I looked at him, realized what I was about to lose by my actions, not someone else's, and kept my ring, my marriage, and my love. My choice.

We had our trials and tribulations as all marriages do, but by making my choice that day I felt we were now equal partners forevermore, and I was going to do my best to make sure we were successful, and that I was worthy of his love. Our first child was born, a boy, and childbirth was scary! No one had told me it was going to hurt! I was surprised!

Anyway, trying to make amends, I asked my new mother to come and help me after the birth and she refused, although she had helped my sisters when they had had their children. I kept forgetting she didn't want to be my substitute mother.

So my husband and I handled things and learned as we went! When my first born was six months old it was discovered that I had a brain aneurysm. I had severe headaches and at times drove places without remembering doing so, so when I first went to a doctor I was told I deserved the headaches and that's what I got for having a child so young! Thank God I went to someone else or I wouldn't be here today!

We spent a lot of time in the hospital. My son was watched during the day by my husband's step- mother-in-law, and by my husband at night. Once released from the hospital we continued to live with my in-laws until I was back on my feet.

The day came again when I had to make another choice. This occurred after weeks of recuperation when I wanted to go for a drive with my son, just to get out of the house for a little bit. My mother-in-law said, "you can go for a ride, but your son will stay here," and she took my son out of my arms. Boy was I mad! I took my son back forcibly and said, "we are going for a drive." We moved back home that weekend! I was better.

We had another son and a daughter quickly, so that before I turned twenty, I was married, had three children and had survived a brain aneurysm. I was always told that my birth mother was too young to have a child, that's why she was unable to care for me. But she was twenty-two! Since infants do not come with a how-to book designed specifically for them, parenthood was a fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants kind of experience. Being the one who spent the most amount of time with the children, I

became the disciplinarian by default. The only experiences I had of child-raising were my own experiences (shouldn't be repeated) and other people casually observed. What I knew was what I didn't like about children's behavior and I made sure mine didn't act that way. What I became was an authoritative parent.

The following are a list of the types of parents I learned about in my master's Sociology classes:

Authoritative Parents: Are demanding, have specific rules with consequences, yet can explain the reasons for the rules and their expectations, but can also be flexible and can discuss discipline. They are also loving and care about their children's needs and wants (Arnett, 2013).

Authoritarian Parents: Have no compromises, one must follow the rules or else. They have very little emotional attachment with their children (Arnett, 2013).

Permissive Parents: Rarely discipline, few rules, gives lots of freedom (Arnett, 2013).

Disengaged Parents: Have low expectations, provide no behavior correction, impose no limits. They also express little love or concern, no attachment (Arnett, 2013).

I had set rules and discipline, yet I loved and cared about them, which saved me from being too much of a dictator. Remember: one learns through modeling and learned behavior (Button & Gealt, 2010), but to a point. I was determined to do better.

I learned in a Sociology of Violence class that most adolescent abuse occurs in households with:

Low income

Lack of supervision

Harsh discipline

Lack of parental interest

Young Parents

Whether one is trying not to be a stereotype or not, there have been studies that show the risk factors that occur over and over in one variation or another. All I knew was that I had to do better than what I grew up with (Barnett, Miller-Perrin, Perrin, 2011). Learning Theory states that children who have witnessed certain types of violent behavior will later recreate that behavior (Akers, 2001, Button & Gealt, 2010, Caffaro & Conn-Caffaro, 1998, 2009). In some cases I believe that is true, but I disagree that all abused children will then abuse their own children. While my children were spanked at times during discipline, they were not abused as I was, psychologically or physically.

Chapter Five

Future Prospects

When I was given the opportunity to go to college for free, my husband and I decided I should go, so that when I was done I would be able to contribute to our livelihood as well. I would be gone Monday thru Friday afternoon and then come home every weekend, or they all would come to my apartment and stay with me for a weekend away. The kids were in school every day until 3:30 p.m., then they went to a babysitter until 5:00 p.m. had dinner, did homework, then bedtime. They wouldn't be missing much time with me. After one semester, my oldest son, who was in the sixth grade at the time, started having issues in school, so I came home and took care of the issues and changed my major from Radiology Technician to Certified Medical Assistant and returned to school in the fall. My new mother stated that I had no business going to school, even though I explained this was to help us out in the future. She cut all further contact with me, to this day.

Awareness

While my kids were growing up, we were actively involved in their after-school pursuits. Our involvement with the boys in Little League dictated a lot of our summers. What I started recognizing was that while our town was very involved in their kids athletic endeavors, not all of the parents were. I don't mean the parents that had to work and then missed their kid's games at times, but the kids who had parent(s) at home who refused to watch their kids participate. I suppose letting them participate was better than not allowing them to play, but not by much.

Being the team mom, I started recognizing the forgotten children, the ones I ended up bringing home and eventually picking up as well. I personally was allowed to play softball in the local city league, but no one ever watched me play when I was younger either. When I had moved in with my aunt in Ohio, I had the opportunity to play varsity volleyball. On parent night, she was there walking me across the court! What a difference! Seeing the kids at the ball field, I started recognizing that I wasn't the only one who hadn't been wanted. I was recognizing the look certain children had, the defeated posture some kids had as well. Yes, I know you can't assume children are abused or neglected just by how they look, but you can recognize when parents aren't in attendance for their kids, and you can recognize when some children aren't happy. This is what I saw.

This understanding happened to me once before when I was in my first program at college. I was doing an Emergency Room rotation as part of my program when a toddler was brought in by a baby sitter. She had taken a chance when she saw repeated injuries to the child, and had brought the child in to be examined. I sat with that child, held him in my arms before and after they did a full series of x-rays on him to look for previous injuries and or abuse and found it. I wanted to take that child home with me, to protect him and give him a new life.

Duty to Report

Subsection 13-3620 of the Arizona State Legislature, states that there are specific professionals who are duty-bound to report suspected abuse (www.azleg.gov/ars/13/03620.htm).

The following is a limited list:

Social Workers

Teachers, principals, school personnel

Physicians, nurses, healthcare workers

Counselors, therapists, mental health professionals

Child care providers

Medical Examiners, coroners

Law enforcement officers

Substance abuse counselors

Camp directors, employees and volunteers, directors of youth centers

Parole officers

Children's Services came then and took the boy away. I tried to petition for the opportunity to adopt him but was told that the current goal of the state was to return the child to its family, even though the mother's four older children had been taken away as well for abuse and were currently living with their grandmother.

I learned much later in a Career Concepts class by Professor Savikas that what I was recognizing in adolescents and trying to do unconsciously was to save the children, to advocate and help them find their way to a better place.

Chapter Six

Teaching

When my sons attended a private boys' boarding school as day students to obtain a better education than the local public school provided, I started recognizing a trend there as well. There were kids of all types who needed attention and acted out because of their own individual life stories. They sought attention, no matter what kind, and needed an outlet for their emotions. There were rich kids whose parents sent them away because they could or to elevate their own status; court-assigned kids who just needed someone, anyone to care. As well as regular everyday students who got sent away for who knows what reasons. They all needed an advocate of some type, and I wanted to be that advocate. Even though I had worked as an Emergency Medical Technician for seven years, helping individuals with their medical emergencies, my instructor stated subconsciously, it had not been enough, that I had felt as if I wasn't helping enough people. Which, he explained, was why I had chosen to be an art teacher at the same school my boys had attended: to provide them with the outlet they needed to express themselves through art, to release the emotions they felt in the situation they were in.

While teaching there for three years, my favorite lesson plan to get the kids to open up, to get them to reach deep inside and discover feelings they didn't know they had, was a lesson plan about honor and respect. My subject matter was Alexandra Nechita. Her true life story goes as follows:

Before Alexandra was born, her father fled then-Communist Romania, leaving his pregnant wife behind to find a better life for his family in the United States. After a year and a half, Alexandra and her mother were able to leave Romania and join her father in America. From the time she was two years old, Alexandra loved to color. That's all she wanted to do. When she was four, her parents took away her crayons and coloring books, hoping to make her go outside and play with the other children. Instead, Alexandra took blank paper and pencils and designed her own coloring books and colored with them. Seeing her love of art her parents gave back her crayons and coloring books. When Alexandra was in the third grade, her teacher recognized the style of drawing that Alexandra preferred. She asked her if she had any more drawings at her house. Alexandra said yes, lots. A visit was scheduled and Alexandra's teacher came to her house. Upon viewing her artwork, her teacher asked her if she knew who Picasso was, or if she had ever seen any of his artwork. Alexandra said no and her parents stated they had never taken her to a museum. The teacher made some contacts at a local museum and had representatives come over to view Alexandra's work. It was decided that Alexandra drew just like Picasso in that her figures were

abstract, had multiple eyes and views of the body and figures in the same picture. From then on she was compared to and called “little Picasso.”

I then ask my classes if they have ever heard of Picasso. Some say they have. I ask them if they’ve ever heard of a painting called “Guernica.” More students recognize Picasso’s name then. I pass around a picture of ‘Guernica” and explain the abstract and cubist style of drawing.



Fig. 1 “Guernica,” by Pablo Picasso, 1937 oil on canvas 137.4” x 305.5”

I explain how, while Alexandra paints to show honor and respect, many famous artists paint to protest certain historical moments. Picasso’s “Guernica” was painted to protest the Spanish Civil War and the inhumanities that occurred. I then show

Alexandra's "My Superman" and ask the class what they see, assuring them that there are no wrong answers.

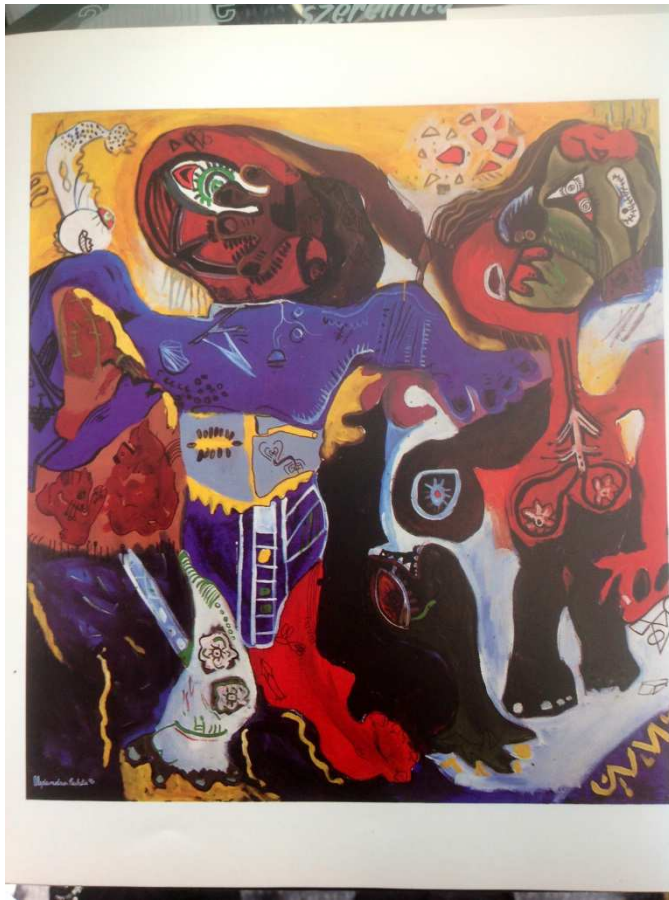


Fig. 2 "My Superman," by Alexandra Nechita, 1985 60"x 60" acrylic on canvas

Eventually they recognize an abstract rendition of Superman, recognizing the cape and the Superman outfit.

Alexandra always writes a few paragraphs with each of her paintings so that people will understand why she painted what she did. "My Superman" represented her

father and how he was her superman for escaping the Communist country of Romania at great risk to himself, just to make a better life for his family. So she honors and respects her father for what he did.

Her short essay on the back of the print is as follows:

My Superman

My dad is my superman because without him going through his troubles- when he left Romania and came to the United States- Without him I wouldn't be in America. At that point in, 1985, it was really tough to escape. My dad really made our dreams come true. He is my hero because of what he's done, his courage. He could have been jailed trying to escape the country it was totally illegal. He risked his life for my mom and me, so we could be in a safe place, somewhere where we could have the freedom to make our own choices (Alexandra Nechita, 1996).

I also show a print by Marc Chagall called "I am my Village" as another demonstration of how an artist can honor family and where they grew up.



Fig. 3 “I am my Village,” by Marc Chagall, 1911 oil on canvas, 192.1 x 151.4 cm

Alexandra and Chagall both use cubism as well as fantasy-like representations of their life experiences and abstraction.

As another work of art that expresses emotion, protest and experiences, I then show Goya's “The Third of May” which represents his protest of the Peninsular War in Spain in 1808-1814, although his art is supposed to be realistic.



Fig. 4 "The Third of May," by Goya, 1814 oil on canvas 106" x 137"

The students learn through Alexandra's and Chagall's paintings that life experiences can be expressed through artwork in a manner to represent life through honor and respect, including Picasso's and Goya's protest against war through their artwork. I then have the students make a list of five people whom they know personally whom they respect and or honor. Yes, they do try to select musical icons and movie stars, but I repeat they have to know them personally! They then have to write a short essay about why they honor or respect that person. When they are done, they have to draw that person, either in a realistic manner like Goya or in an abstract/ cubist manner

like Nichita, Picasso or Chagall. We then duplicate their rendition on to watercolor paper and paint it, attaching a short essay to it as Alexandra does.

Even though I enjoyed teaching art in the high school arena and helped many students through their life issues, about which many of them still text me now and then as they update me on their lives, I felt limited in my efforts to help them more, in an official manner. I briefly looked at administration, mainly being a principle, but felt that was more of a disciplinarian position, so I jumped into school counseling. While I enjoyed one-on-one counseling and enjoyed the thought of being able to help advocate for the student in a more official capacity, I did not enjoy group counseling with high school students. All I could see was the lack of confidentiality in the school setting, leading to more problems for the students in the general population of the school. I realized that students are more apt to talk to teachers they trust then to talk to someone in the “office” they aren’t sure about. Yes, trust can be built with a school counselor, but I felt and experienced that trust came easier in the classroom.

Aware that I could potentially help more students if I returned to teaching, and that I had just learned about the difficulties of school budgeting and the precarious standing of school counselors in the public school districts, I made the decision to take the knowledge I’ve gained in school counseling, education and sociology back to the teaching arena where I will be more prepared, and better trained to advocate for the students in a different and more encompassing way. I have a better understanding of

how the sociology of the family dynamic affects the students' daily lives, and an understanding of how to just listen, to not jump in and try to solve everything for the student in any way possible. To listen, and to guide if needed, to give recommendations and information about areas of help if the student needs it. I've learned how to gauge the potential depth of distress a student may be in, to recognize when a student needs more help than I can provide, to recognize the dangers. My master's studies have prepared me to be a more developed and a more aware teacher.

Chapter Seven

Lost Youth

Learning that according to historians, child abuse has always existed, was an eye-opening experience for me. Yes, I knew child abuse has always existed, but not necessarily why and to what extent in specific areas, even in areas of supposed high standing. I was surprised and disgusted to learn that in ancient times infants and children were considered property, that they could be sold to take care of a debt or simply killed because something was physically wrong with them. Or they were considered a burden (Hilarski, 2008). This type of parental behavior was supported by the Code of Hammurabi, which claimed the father had full control of his kids until they married. All and any behavior to control one's children was accepted, except for incest (King, 2002).

Early Greek philosophers allowed newborns to be killed. Laws were proposed that crippled children shouldn't be raised (Hilarski, 2008). In the Roman Era, an infant could only live if it had potential for the family (Hilarski, 2008). Newborn girls in China were drowned up until the late 1800's (Koenen & Thompson, 2009). Killing female infants was considered the same as abortion in parts of India (Koenen & Thompson, 2008). In the Middle Ages, children's rights to live was protected by Judaism &

Christianity. In the Russian Orthodox Church, having children defined women. If you participated in infanticide or birth control you would face penalties. Abortion was considered the same as murder. If you killed an embryo you had to fast for five years. If you killed a fetus you had to fast for seven years (Pushkareva, 1997). While incest was not allowed, you were allowed to loan your child to others for sex (Radbill, 1987). In Russia father-daughter incest was common, children were beaten regularly, and children who complained were beaten publicly (Radbill, 1987). In the Early Modern Period, in 1535, the English Poor Laws allowed neglected delinquent children to be work-farmed or put in poor houses (Shoemaker & Wolfe, 2005). Children could also be put into apprenticeship to adults who taught various skills. At times, deformities from physical punishments were the norm of child labor. English records in 1829 showed the causes of children's death included drownings, burnings and scaldings. Careless suffocation by rolling over on children in bed was high in Philadelphia (Radhill, 1987). Early American children suffered under apprenticeship as well as the Poor Laws. Laws against child abuse did not exist. Parents were held responsible for the misbehavior of their children, so parents punished their own children. Stubborn Child Laws allowed parents to kill their children if the latter repeatedly misbehaved. Two-thirds of children died before the age of four (Hilarski, 2008). Children's lives, according to history, were a nightmare; children were killed, abandoned, whipped and sexually abused and terrorized (Pagelow, 1984). Infanticide was common in the Victorian Era; dead infants

were found lying in the streets in Philadelphia in 1834 (Wortman, 1985). In India rather than abandoning female infants, an Indian Dais who is a midwife is contacted. When a baby boy is born, everything is fine. When a female infant is born, the midwife turns the baby upside down and jerks her so her spinal cord snaps. She then tells the mother the child was stillborn (Singh, 2000). In the Industrial Age, children were considered cheap labor. Many families wouldn't have survived if their children hadn't worked. Eventually laws were passed that children had to attend school, which saved many children from being taken advantage of by big companies.

Yes, I do know that children are still being abused, if not physically then they are taken advantage of because both parents work. Children are taking care of children. When is a child allowed to be a child? Why must they be forced to be an adult before they are physically and mentally able to do so?

A lot of children have survived because of Resilience. Resilience is a term that is applied to at-risk youth. It involves certain skills, abilities, personal qualities and attributes that enable some youth who have been exposed to significant stress and adversity to cope and even thrive in spite of the stress and adversity. Some children even develop strength and positive coping strategies from the exposure (Bernard, 1997, 2004; Friesen & Brennan, 2005; Goldstein & Brooks, 2006; Werner, 2006). Though I didn't and don't have all of the following characteristics of a resilient adolescent, I

choose to believe I was resilient. The following is a partial list of resilient adolescent characteristics:

Being active in approaching life's problems

Being constructive when perceiving pain, frustration, and negative experiences

Gaining positive attention

Viewing life as positive and meaningful

Having positive self-esteem

Having a sense of humor

Being willing to accept responsibility

Being proactive

Being adaptable

(Capuzzi & Cross, 2008).

My interest, since it's not possible to save the world, is that children of latch-key age who are too old to be in daycare, but too young to stay at home alone, have a place to go after school. To be able to be a child for a while longer, to not have to be responsible for their younger siblings, to not have to cook dinner for the family simply because they are the only one who is at home. I would like to give these students, ages ten to sixteen, an outlet, somewhere they can go to release their daily frustrations, a safe place where no one judges them, a place where art exists just for them so they can

let go of their emotions, create, be who they want to be, find a way to communicate,
even if it's just for a little while.

Chapter Eight

Why is Art Important? My philosophy of Art

In this philosophy statement I will discuss many important aspects of art education and why it is important not only as a subject in its own right, but also how studies in art education will assist students across the curriculum. I will discuss how students of all ages and abilities benefit from art studies. I will also discuss the responsibility of teachers to teach all the components of art education. It should be the goal of all teachers to give students the opportunity to obtain knowledge, skills and critical thinking abilities that will enhance their daily lives.

Art education is one subject in the curriculum that is able to add to its basic foundations and still stay current with the ever-changing demands of society. Art education also offers something rarely seen in other scholastic content areas: it offers an immediate, emotional and intellectual response.

There are educational concepts that are very important to an excellent art program. They are Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE), and Visual-Culture Art Education (VCAE).

DBAE involves four separate components that are very important to art education. An art educator needs to teach all the components so that the student will

receive all the information needed for a successful art education. The four components of DBAE are art production, art criticism, art history and culture, and aesthetics. Art production is important because it gives students the opportunity to express themselves as well as build perception and observation, and allows for the investigation of materials and development of reflective skills as well as the learning of specific techniques to create an original artwork. Studying art history and culture is important because students need to understand the techniques and the issues current at the time the artwork was created. By studying these artworks, students will understand some of the reasons behind the artists' need to express themselves visually. Art criticism sharpens students' perceptions and enhances their critical thinking skills, while allowing students to experience different view-points. Aesthetics encourages students to make critical value judgments about what they see.

The study of visual culture within art education is another aspect of a good art education program. Visual culture will further enhance students' critical skills, which are needed to interpret and critique visual culture, and will allow the student to create a visual statement as well. Visual culture involves a wide range of study, including culture, politics, economics, sociology, history and aesthetic expression. The study of visual culture is an additional way of teaching intercultural knowledge to the student. Using an art-centered approach when teaching diversity allows the students to use the skills learned in art education to communicate with many cultures.

Comprehensive art programs include community-based instruction. This involves the students leaving the school building and exploring the community. Community leaders or local artists can come into the school and talk with the students about local issues such as graffiti or murals on local buildings. Students who are actively involved on a personal level when learning retain the information easier than when it is presented in a distant or abstract manner.

Connections across the curriculum are made when studying visual culture because areas such as culture, politics, economic, sociology, and history and aesthetic expression are discussed and examined. Students' abilities to transfer knowledge are enhanced through their visual experiences. This allows them to make critical choices and also to be able to make connections between past and present experiences.

Students' abilities to remember what they have seen and studied allow the student to critically examine other aspects of what they see in other studies and in other daily experiences. For example, an art history lesson about architecture can transfer to a history lesson about different types of dwellings (both past and present), allowing the students to compare what they have studied to the types of buildings they live in. An art lesson could include the students designing their idea of a perfect house.

Art education has the ability to engage students of all ages, genders, physical handicaps, and cultural differences. Slight alterations to lesson plans can be made to work with all the aforementioned students. Taking into account the different abilities

and learning capabilities of the students, art-fused curricula can help build academic skills for students whose intelligence lies outside traditional boundaries. Making the students' aware of the importance of art-fused curricula will allow them to become aware of and appreciate the value of learning and realize their ability to transfer the skills learned to other subjects.

It is important to students' development to learn skills such as comprehension, problem solving, communication and critical thinking. I believe these advanced learning skills can be taught and further enhanced through art education. By developing these skills and techniques through art, students will become proficient at representing their ideological beliefs. Through art, students will be able to express their emotions, ideas and personal beliefs, further enhancing their personal development and means of expression. Simply learning good art techniques/studio skills is not enough to promote advanced thinking or the use of critical thinking skills. Incorporating visual culture, material culture, and multiculturalism, as well as art history, aesthetics, and art criticism and the elements and principles of design will enhance the students' abilities to learn.

Art as an Emotional Outlet

Art as an emotional outlet is important for adolescents who are at the stage of forming their own identities and experiencing and adapting to their own social development. Art gives them a chance to express themselves, to release their stress,

whether they are having issues in school, at home, in their relationships either private or public, or even in their neighborhood. Art is an expressive tool, regardless of whether one is expressing happiness, joy, anger or pain. Becoming involved in their individual creations allows adolescents to make their own choices and their own decisions, to make mistakes and to have the freedom of choice to make corrections. Creating art allows adolescents the ability to have total freedom, to build self-confidence and independence, to deviate from group conformity, to reestablish self-esteem. Art allows adolescents the option to learn how to problem solve, to understand their emotions. It also provides them a way to better understand their own behaviors and actions.

Adolescents who participate in art, whether it's in school or an after school program or even art therapy, quickly find that they are able to communicate through their art, that they are able to express their thoughts in a non-threatening way, to say or express what they have not been able to communicate until that point. While many adolescents are not comfortable with speaking about what is bothering them, or even believing anyone cares what they have to say at all, art opens the door through imagery. It can be used as a statement, a protest, a way to vent, a way to show triumphs, a way to express absolutely any emotion at all.

Art can also be a safe outlet, a way to express anxieties about a personal manner or even world issues. Art can be used as a way of expressing where they are currently in life and where they would like to be. Teenagers want to express themselves, but in

general they tend to keep their feelings and emotions to themselves until they have an outburst, or act out, or participate in risky behavior. Expression through art can assist the adolescent in self-discovery, empowerment, and stress relief, as well as many other areas of need. Having the ability to express their selves through art will give adolescents the confidence to seek art as a form of outlet so that they don't internalize their anger or grief for long periods of time.

Student Teaching

During my student teaching at Kent State University in my undergraduate Art Education Program, I student-taught at two juvenile detention centers, one in Stow and one in Ravenna. What I saw there, regardless of why they were incarcerated, was need. They had a need to be wanted, a need to change who they had become, a need to move in a new direction. They were anxious to learn, to participate in any project we brought for them to do. Were they bored? Tired of living in a cell? Probably. But they participated throughout the art history aspect of the lesson to the actual participation in the art project. It didn't matter whether they were "natural" artists or if they were having difficulties; they enjoyed expressing themselves. It's hard to fake an interest 100% of the time, so I know they were happy we were there. That is what continued my interest in teaching art, as well as providing me with an outlet for personal expression through art.

Stereotyping- Conclusion

In the beginning, I explained how my goal was to avoid being a stereotype. Though I have read that there are many different stereotypical behaviors, all I knew was what I didn't want to become. I knew that I was a higher-risk parent because I had experienced some physical abuse, some neglect, and some emotional abuse. I was determined not to do the same thing to my own children, not to continue the cycle of abuse.

Resilience plays a part, I believe, in helping one decide who and what one is going to become, regardless of one's past. Choice plays a part as well. I believe that even people with abhorrent behaviors are capable of making choices. Victims of abuse much worse than I ever experienced can still make the choice not to participate in their own learned behaviors, not to pass on what they went through to their children or relationships. It may be hard and a constant struggle, but it is possible.

I have proven every stereotype that was applied to me wrong. I was married a couple of weeks after I turned seventeen. Am I still married? Yes. I am fifty-two years old as I write this essay. Did we have difficulties? Yes. Every marriage does, regardless of your age. Do I advocate teen marriage? No. Do I advocate teen pregnancy? No. Why? Am I being hypocritical? No. I believe we survived because of love, a partnership, need, and want. The fact that my husband was older and more mature than I helped a

lot. We also had a support system of my husband's friends, and specific family members, and God's guidance.

Was I a perfect mother? No, I don't think any mother is. All we can do in this life is correct what we think was wrong when we were growing up, to do better. When your children grow up they will do the same thing, improve upon what they didn't like. Parenting is a learning process. As long as you love your child or children, you are ahead of the game. Do your best to provide and care for your children, and everything will end up on the right track.

I have three children, two boys and one girl. Are they successful? Can they take care of and provide for themselves and their own families? Yes. My husband and I have succeeded in raising children! Yes, I have a successful and happy marriage! Yes, I grew up in the system. Yes, I have higher expectations for myself.

I am uncomfortable with praise: I received an award for helping in the rescue of a thirteen-year-old who had a heart attack. In that same year I also helped rescue a police officer who had a heart attack. My award was for EMT of the year, 1991. I was given the award and expected to make a speech, but I said thank you and walked back to my seat. I was happy I did my job, and we were successful in saving the teen's life as well as the officer's, but I didn't want recognition for it. I still have attachment issues, but I made choices long ago. They were good choices and I am not a stereotype. I have proven certain stereotypes are not destined. Stereotypes are not always true. Theories

do not apply 100% to each person. We are individuals, with expectations and choices. We can become who and what we want to become. That's why I am going back to teaching if possible, either in the classroom or in an after-school art program. I will take the knowledge I have gained through the School Counseling Program, the Education Department, and my Sociology studies through the Liberal Arts Program to enhance my understanding of life, adolescents and counseling I will use them to be a better art teacher, to be an advocate for all students regardless of age, so that I can model that change if possible, and open doors to those who want to walk through them into a different life, one that expresses their positive choices.

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