

The Roads Traveled and Holes not Avoided

My academic journey has been a long and sometimes painful experience, not that it has been all bad. It all started back when I was only a toddler. My parents never read to me or sang the alphabet song with me. My education was PBS television; my teachers were Captain Kangaroo, Mr. Rodgers and Sesame Street. My mother was only sixteen when she married my dad and I was born two years later. We were never well off or what I would call stable. We often lived or stayed with other relatives never really having our own home. Back to my educational path, I remember my first book; *Curious George goes to the Hospital*. I remember this book because I was four years old and in the hospital getting a tonsillectomy. My grandmother bought the book for me along with a stuffed *Mickey Mouse*. Grandma read that Curious George book to me as I was waiting for the procedure. Listening to her read the book my imagination ran wild; I wanted to be Curious George- I thought playing in a wheelchair sounded like fun. It was frustrating not being able to read for myself.

Later that year I was in preschool- a time when education became intimidating for me. It seemed like all the other kids could write their names, say the alphabet and some could even count to one hundred and tie their shoes. I could not do any of those things. After the teachers did an inventory of skills that we all had, I was separated from the group to get "special help." This made me feel like an outcast from most the other kids, and I had a hard time making friends. I didn't want to go to preschool after that. I would fake being sick or throw huge tantrums about going. This leads me to one of the holes along the way; I never expressed to anyone why I was acting out. This is the first time I have ever shared this with anyone, and it has been thirty-one years. That's really amazing.

The educational path continues. After preschool I was off to kindergarten. I was only five when it was registration time. The teachers in preschool thought I should do another year of preschool and since you had to be six by the May before school started and I wouldn't have my birthday until July the school and teachers thought waiting would be good. My parents, however, had different thoughts. They thought I was ready and would do better if I were in school with the kids I started school with. They fought to get me into school and the school gave in and let me start. From that point on I was always one of the youngest in my class. Though my parents never changed how they never helped with homework; didn't even ask or care if I had any. In second grade my teacher would paddle you if your home work wasn't done. Every morning if there was homework due I had to walk to the principal's office and get my card take it to my teacher. The teacher had to document how many licks I would get and why, and after the paddling I was placed in a desk in the front of the classroom facing a wall and told I could not rejoin my class until my homework was complete..That was absolutely horrifying. I spent a lot of time at that desk. The teacher and my parents were trying to figure out why I was having such a hard time with school. They had my eyes checked thinking I just couldn't see the board which was true, but I didn't want to get glasses. I was the only person in my family that didn't have them and this made me feel special. What I did to avoid failing my eye exam was I memorized the eye chart while I was waiting for the doctor. The eye doctor told my parents the "Donnie has eyes like an eagle." The school and my parents thought I just needed more help, so my special help continued all through elementary school along with the outcast feelings. That is until third grade when I joined pee-wee football. This is where a new positive path begins.

Football helped me make friends and to get me engaged into wanting to go to school. I played football very well I was one of the better players on the team. Even though I was always one of the smallest, I was fast, and I could catch the ball and I didn't cry when I got hit- even

when my ankle was broken. My team made it to the pee-wee super bowl ever year. Sports are one of the best choices I made and the path that helps me avoid many holes in the path.

Then about halfway through fifth grade my family moved to Michigan to help my grandpa on his dairy farm due to the fact that he had a heart attack. This was a big change in my life because before we moved to Michigan I was living in the south. My first 3 years of schooling were in a small town in Alabama, and half way through third grade my family moved to Houston, Texas. This move to reed City, Michigan would have me starting my third elementary school . With my thick southern accent I was a target for being picked on daily. The dread of going to school returned. In Reed City the sport most children played was basketball, a game that, at that time, I never played or even watched. There was no pee-wee football program only football on the playground, where nobody wanted me on their team because I talked funny., even though I had more experience playing football. I just found the children at Reed City to be cruel and mean. I ended up going to school in Reed City for about two months then my parents rented us a house in Evert. This meant that it was time to move once again. I finished my fifth grade year in Evert. I found the children in Evert were much more accepting of me and more curious about my accent and where I was from. I made friends quickly in Evert, but this didn't last either. My parents couldn't keep their jobs, which led to us not being able to keep the house that we were renting, so we had to move. We moved into income-based apartments in Reed City which meant going back to Reed City Schools where I was not well accepted.

The start of middle school at Reed City was better than I expected when found out we were moving back. One of the reasons it was better was that I was able to make friends over the summer in our new apartment complex. This would also be the year my parents would get divorced because my dad was an abusive drunk to my mother. The separation before the divorce was very difficult. My mom took out of school one day, and we ended up living in a safe

house for a couple of weeks. Once my mom thought that things were cooled down enough to go back home, we headed back to the apartment where a few days later my dad was arrested for assaulting my mom and two officers. He was then taken to hospital in Traverse City for therapy. He was there for three months. All of this drama affected my education. Divorce is never easy for anyone involved and the children suffer. Middle school is a time I just went to school and did what I needed to do to get by. I learned how to play basketball and even won the free throw contest at the school assembly I went 20 for 20. I never felt fully accepted because it seemed like everyone in Reed City knew each other their whole lives or were related somehow.

Then I was off to high school, and I was excited! This was the first time since fifth grade that I could play football again. The summer of my freshman year I was only 5'5 and 93 pounds and I was going to play football. I made the team and started both ways which meant I got play offense and defense. On offense I was a wide receiver and on defense I played cornerback. Playing football was a good path to take. In order to play football I would have to have a grade point average of 3.0 or better. If I wanted to play football I had to do school work. I did all the work I needed to do and played every game. Then the winter of my ninth grade year my mom moved to Big Rapids where I finished the school year. My dad stayed in Reed City, and this is where my pattern of moving continues. I would live with my dad in the fall and go to Reed City High school and my mom in the spring which meant I would be going to many other high schools. The high schools I attended living with my mom went like this: Big Rapids, Ewart, Gladwin, and West Chicago. While I was living with my mom in Gladwin she started taking a photography class at Central Michigan University. During this time she would be gone from Sunday night or Monday morning until the following Saturday, leaving the 15 year old me in charge of my two brothers ages 13, 6, and my 10 year old sister. This continued until the end of the school year when I moved back with my dad and my mom moved to Illinois.

During high school my parents told me that college is a waste of money. I just needed to find a good paying union factory job. They would say that I was not smart enough to make through college and should just work on finding a job for after high school. When I graduated high school my grade point average was 3.333 on a 4.0 scale. After high school I started working at Eagle Village as staff member for the adventure learning center learn to lead group building activities and high adventure experiences i.e. rock climbing and ropes courses. Working here I had the opportunity to work with many educated people that gave me the confidence that I could go to college and succeed. I didn't start college until 1999 seven years after graduation. I went to Faulkner State Community College in Gulf Shores, Alabama where I took one class public speaking and I 4.0'd it. Then two years later I enrolled at the University of South Alabama in Mobile where I attend as a part time student while working full time. I was at the at U.S.A. for 2 years until I moved back to Michigan and transferred into Central Michigan University where I wanted to become a special education teacher.

I was living in St. Johns, Michigan with my long term girl friend. I was also working full time and commuting. Things were going well until I ran into algebra class. I am still too intimidated by algebra. I was so intimidated by algebra that I switched my major to Therapeutic Recreation where there was only a lower level math needed. I did well in all of my Education and therapeutic recreation classes. I have always struggled with the algebra and hard sciences. I was on this path until my girlfriend and I decided to go our separate ways after eight years. I ended up withdrawing from some classes and finishing only a couple. Later that summer I met my future wife, life turning for the better. She is a registered nurse at our local hospital. She encouraged me to go back to school and suggested the medical field for job stability. I started Baker College in Cadillac with the hopes of earning a nursing degree. Once again I struggled with the hard sciences anatomy and physiology. This was my first exposure to biology since I didn't have to take in high school I took what was labeled earth sciences. To get into the nursing

program I would need to get a B- or better in all my classes because I was competing for spots with people getting A's. The higher your grades the more likely you would be accepted into the nursing program. It took me two times taking A&P to get the grade of B- or better. After struggling at Baker I transferred to Ferris State University into the respiratory care program mostly because I already had the math requirement, but I still needed the chemistry. At Ferris I took all of the allied health classes and achieved 3 points and above but chemistry was not one of those classes. I took the lowest required chemistry twice and both times I ended up with a C- and I needed a B- or better. After I failed chemistry for the second time I knew that I had to do something different, so I contacted the counseling office at Ferris and had to do some testing so I could be assessed on what my strengths are the test showed that I would be good in the social sciences. I agreed with the test results because I have been working as a youth counselor at Eagle Village for years and thoroughly enjoyed working with kids.

This is how my path has brought me here to the Bachelor of Integrated Studies where my goals are to take as many communication, psychology and social work classes as I can so that I may get accepted into a school where I can get my Master of Counseling Degree. I am finding my classes very interesting this semester, besides this class I am taking research (comm. 300) methods in communication, (comm. 305) communication in human relations and (Psyc. 331) psychology of personality. In the fall I need to take another math class which has me nervous but I now know it is ok to ask for help. This assignment has done a great job helping me reflect on my life. I know I am on the right path and there will be holes along the way but I am better equipped to avoid them now.