

Reflective Essay

By Danette Buehrle

It is hard for me to begin to explain all that I have learned in this class. There have been so many times where I have been challenged to think about a number of topics that I would have never given thought to before. Also, having been required to do fifth hour activities has forced me to be on campus more which is good for me. Living off campus and being older than most of my peers has been harder for me to accept than I thought it would. Having to be on campus made me more comfortable with the university, the students, and myself.

The first paper that we were asked to write was about something that we created. I thought about this for a while and the only thing I could come up with was that I had, in essence, “created” myself. Throughout the process of writing that paper it was necessary for me to relive so many events in my life that I thought I had dealt with. I surprised myself when, after proofreading it many times, I started to cry. I cried because of what happened to me, because I was telling my story to strangers, and because I was definitely not “over it.” Even though that paper was one of the fastest I have ever written it was absolutely not the easiest. Regardless, I am still happy with the way it turned out and that I decided to turn it in. Letting a stranger into my life made it easier to accept who I am and where I am.

The next paper I decided to include in this portfolio is titled *Plato and Weil: Thoughts on Walls*. I wrote this paper rather quickly also, so I was hesitant to hear what my peer group was going to say about it. I was glad to hear that they all thought it was the best paper I had written all semester. This meant a lot to me because I had never written a paper like this one. In this

paper I used the ideas of Plato and Simone Weil to support my own thoughts on Jeannette Walls' *The Glass Castle*.

The reason I liked that paper so much is because I really loved all three texts: *The Glass Castle*, Allegory of the Cave, and "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God." After reading the summary of *The Glass Castle*, I knew that I would love the book because Jeannette Walls has had such a rough life and there was not a doubt in my mind that I would relate to it. I thought that I would really dislike the other two texts, but I am thrilled to say that I loved them both. I am elated that Plato was a part of this course because I would never have read any of his works on my own. After reading just a bit, however, I cannot wait to read more.

I have similar thoughts on Simone Weil. I had never heard of her until this course, but I am glad that she was part of it. Sometimes while reading her essay I had to stop and reread it because I did not understand what she was trying to say, but that is what makes her great. Having to look back over her thoughts made me think about them more deeply and those are the passages that I remember today. My favorite quote of hers is: "every effort adds a little gold to a treasure no power on earth can take away." If this quote were not so long, I would have it tattooed on my body. It means so much more to me than the topic she was referring to. To me, this quote is about life. It is about knowing that every time I learn something or help someone or experience something new, I gain a little bit for myself that no one can take from me.

The final paper that is in my portfolio is one that I wrote about recycling and why my apartment complex should have recycling containers next to the garbage bins. The reason I chose this topic is because my roommate bought a box of 100% recycled tissues and there were a bunch of statistics on there about how much recycling helps the environment. I was shocked by

the fact that if everyone in America replaced just one box of tissues with those that are 100% recycled, we could save 283,000 trees. Another reason I chose this topic is because I watched the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* with a student who was a meteorology major. Being able to have him with me to explain in more detail what Al Gore was talking about really helped me to understand global warming on a different level. Without this class, I would never have taken the time to learn about recycling statistics or global warming.

The other reason I am glad that this class is required is because of the mandatory fifth hour activities. Initially, I was annoyed that we had to do these activities, yet they gave me an excuse to spend more time on campus with other students and professors. Being a transfer student from a commuter college, I never felt as if I were a part of something. Here, that is not the case. The fifth hour activities gave me that feeling.

When I went to my first fifth hour, a discussion with two cast members from MTV's *The Real World*, I did not really learn anything that I would consider valuable, but I did create a memory. I went to this discussion with my roommate and her boyfriend. And, while nothing spectacular happened, I do have something that I can look back on and talk about with them when we are old. I do not have any of these memories from my old college, and without having Core, I would not have them at this college either.

The other fifth hour activity that I went to was required. It was a panel discussion on climate change. I know that I learned a few things while I was there, but that is not what sticks out in my mind. What I remember about that activity is two-fold. One, I remember sitting in the auditorium and looking around thinking that I'm part of something. And, two, I remember feeling smart. I felt like I was a part of something because everyone present was there to learn more about global warming, and I was too. This may seem insignificant to most people, but I am

big on “moments” and that was a moment for me. I felt smart while I was there because I understood what was being said. Again, to most people, it is not that big of a deal. However, knowledge is important to me. I like being the one that my friends come to when they need an answer. And with a group of friends who have never taken a college course, I feel like I need to know things. It is the one thing that I have and they do not. Having a life where I always wanted the family that my friends have, I feel some need to have something they do not.

Overall, I am actually glad that this course was required. I initially thought that because I was going to be in a class with a bunch of teenagers that I would hate the class and that I was not going to learn anything. This was not the case at all. Being in a class with teenagers actually helped me to realize that even though I am older than everyone else, we are all here for the same purpose and are therefore much more alike than I ever thought possible.

Another reason I am thankful for this course is because of all the reading we had to do. In the beginning it seemed like a pain, but being exposed to different authors was a real treat for me because, while I love to read, it is never educational material. And, it is never a book that I actually contemplate when I am done; I usually just pick up the next one. Having to write about books and analyze them made me realize how much I had been missing all these years.

Because I am a transfer student, I am only required to take one semester of Core. There is a part of me, however, who almost wishes that I had to take another semester. I was thinking about checking out the book list for the new semester and reading some on my own. I might even keep up with events taking place on campus and check out a few; to create new memories.