An Emotional Rollercoaster: How Education Changed throughout my Life

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 “You know, Manroocha, when I dropped you off for your first day of Preschool, I was so emotional and I didn’t want to let you go. So when I dropped you off at the front, I stayed in case you got scared. But you know what’s really funny? As soon as I stopped the car and opened your door and got ready to hug you, you ran out of the car with the biggest smile on your face. It’s like you couldn’t wait to break out of your home life and experience this magical experience that your brothers had and you didn’t: school. You ran to school with open arms and your teeth shining and couldn’t wait to be in a classroom.”

Mom tells me this story every time we’re driving through our home town of West Windsor, New Jersey. She used this story to show that my love of the classroom started from a very young age, or to re-motivate me when I was having academic troubles in college.

When I entered high school, I held these stories with me as I walked through the bland grey and maroon walls of West-Windsor Plainsboro High School North. I told myself that no matter what, I would always remember that initial pure, innocent love I had for the classroom setting back in Pre-School and use it as motivation when classes got tough. That kept me running to school everyday with my arms open, and only missing out when I was genuinely sick. Until I got to my senior year math class.

By senior year I felt settled in. I knew who my best friends were, I knew what I loved and hated, and I knew what I wanted to be: a math teacher. It felt like everything sort of came together, so I expected AP Calculus to just solidify my passion for education. However, what ended up happening was that I fell in love with the subject, but I became genuinely terrified and scared for the first time in a classroom.

My calculus teacher was a ruthless male dictator who got immense pleasure out of ridiculing his students. From the first day onward, he constantly brought up the fact that he was an ex-marine, which he seemed to believe justified his aggressive behavior. He cursed out his students, calling us bitches and assholes more than our actual names. In fact, he made sure that we all feed his alpha-dog mentality, as this was the only to get on his good side which in turn lead to you getting a good grade. I kept telling myself that maybe it was just his style; this sort of toughness that was supposed to prepare us for the real world. I kept buying these excuses I made for him because a part of me really didn’t want to hate him. “He doesn’t really hate us.” I used to say, “He’s just rough around the edges, you know? He has to care about us.”

I managed to stay neutral in his class for most of the year, up until about January of 2014. Senior year had brought a lot of challenges to me, so I wasn’t able to come to school a lot. My teacher took this badly, and one day when I approached him for the past homework assignment, he blew up at me, calling me a bitch several times and screaming about how I was a terrible student who never showed up and didn’t deserve this education that he was giving out. He threw a stack of homework papers in my face, and actually turned to another student (who happened to be one of his favorites) and starting talking about how I was such a bad student to him. I sat down in my seat and actually used sheds of tissue paper to wipe up my tears, as a very big part of me didn’t want him to see me cry, as that was just a sign of weakness in his class.

I remember just going home that day and talking to my mom about it, wondering why I had gotten so hurt from the whole experience. Mom knew what my teacher was liked, so she posed the question about why this instance hit me the most. It wasn’t the words; I knew it was something more than just the words.

School was never a fantasy or an escape for me as it wasn’t a perfect place; there was room for improvement just like in every situation. But one thing that I had carried with me throughout my educational lifetime was this idea that teachers, beautiful, passionate, caring, teachers were the foundations that held education together. These math teachers that throughout my life, I had almost worshipped because of their command over the subject but their raw passion for their students, were the basis for my love for education. Even though I had bad teachers, they weren’t bad in terms of behavior, the just had another outlook on teaching that didn’t work for me and I understood that and accepted that. Even if their teaching didn’t speak to me, I knew they cared about their students well being, and that was the most important part to me. Yet as soon as this Calculus teacher blew up at me, it shattered this perfect perception of the ever-loving teacher-student dynamic I had been building up since Pre-School. And it had only hit me then because it was a personal attack; it had hit me then and there that this person really didn’t care about his students. I ran to school that first day of Pre-School with open arms, a skip in my step, and a mind ready to be pushed, yet I ran out of school that horrid day in high school with shreds of used tissue paper and pointless tears that represented my disappointment in what I thought to be the best job at the time.

I still believe that most educators carry this concern for the well-being of their students, but it’s important not to be ignorant about the fact that other teachers exist that don’t have the same goals for their classroom. I learned a lot from my calculus teacher and he honestly made me want to be a teacher even more, just so that I could do my best to combat jerks like him. As a person who doesn’t seem to have much concern for his students, I in turn should return the favor and move on from him. Funny to say, I ended up loving calculus and deciding to major in math, regardless of my high school experiences, and to me that feels like one of the biggest accomplishments I’ve made. I’ve managed to move past his demented teaching ways and still embrace my love for math. And there’s no way he could ever take that away from me.