April McNary

1/13/17

Period 1

Essay #1: Narrative

**The Stress Test**

“Mrs. McNary! Can I go to the bathroom?”

“Do I have to do this?”

“Mrs. McNary, can I go to the nurse? I got a paper cut!”

“Miss, but it’s the weekend. I can’t tell my friends no!”

Ugh...this is the story of my adult, teaching life. I hear my name so many times, and I answer so many questions a day that I am always desperate to find ways to relieve stress in my life. Aside from being a teacher, I am also a mom, a wife, a daughter, a sister, and so much more. Sometimes I wish I had six arms and the ability to work in my sleep, but let’s be real -- I’m no Superwoman. I’m just me. To keep from going insane, I engage in various activities to maintain a tranquil mind. Because I’m always on the go, I find myself relieving stress by gathering with friends and connecting through reading among other things.

Charlie Chaplin once said, “A day without laughter is a day wasted.” I’m pretty sure Chaplin was saying we all need to engage in genuine laughter on a regular basis. No one makes me laugh more than my friends...my pack...my people. Last August my daughter, Audrey, turned four years old. As requested, she had a Rapunzel themed birthday party complete with swimming in the pool, mountains of food, and a competitive coloring contest. What I didn’t expect was how much fun the party would be for the adults.

Filling all of the seats around our massive, dark oak table, our friends (Jenny, Hugo, Isaac, Adriana, Thai, Diane, Jason, and I) colored, ate, drank, and laughed. Isaac thought the Disney *Tangled* characters (on the coloring pages) needed to be a biracial couple to reflect society in a more accurate way. Thus, he made them so. We all laughed, and continued coloring our own papers, which displayed our unique personalities and perspectives on life. My sheet reflected unrealistic colors to represent something one might see in a dream; Jenny’s paper was bright and hopeful. Diane’s coloring was as gothic as she is -- black lipstick and all for Rapunzel in her interpretation.

In all of this coloring chaos, I had completely forgotten how stressed I was just a few hours prior to that moment. Party planning, as a working mom, can be incredibly troubling. I am lucky enough to have friends who are willing to laugh and play as if they had never grown up. I need my friends as constant reminders of how to live a life full of those belly laughs Chaplin says we should strive to obtain daily.

At the same time, life isn’t always so funny. Stress is inevitable. There are difficult moments when words seem to escape me. In these times I find myself turning to reading. When my Grandma Zongker was dying from Alzheimer’s in a nursing home, I felt there were no words I could use to adequately fill the silence between us.

One day, while visiting my grandma, a volunteer from Hospice came to see her. This volunteer asked if she could sing to my grandma. Of course I said she could. As I sat there listening to this complete stranger sing a beautiful melody from what I assume was from the 1930’s, I cried silently. This stranger was connecting to my grandma in a way I know I couldn’t.

Or could I…

Later that day, I went to Barnes and Noble and purchased a book. I decided I would read aloud to my grandma in her dying days. I didn’t have anymore words of my own to give, so I relied on the words of others. The next day, and for several of them to follow, I read one of my favorite books of all time -- Mitch Albom’s *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. As I read, my grandma would watch me. She too had no more words. None that could escape her, anyway. I sat and I read. This was my version of singing -- reading, I know how to do.

Grandma Zongker went to heaven before I finished reading the book. I only reached the 4th person in heaven before her passing. I may not have been singing, but I know my grandma heard me. She heard my voice. I was eased by knowing I could turn to the words of another when all of mine had disappeared into my impending grief. It was reading that calmed my broken heart. To this day, I often find myself getting lost in a good book. I breathe differently when I read. Reading eases my mind of anything which may otherwise seem stressful.

Monday always comes around again, and back to my classroom I go, hoping to change the world one, reluctant teenager at a time. Because stress is something we encounter at work, at home, within our families, or even in party planning, it’s so important to find ways to breathe through the difficult to see the rainbow around us called life. What seems to matter the most is not the stress, but how we choose to deal with the stress. For me, I choose laughter. I choose reading. I choose the beauty that comes from the human connection.

Bring on those questions, kids.

I’m ready for them.

I’m ready.