“Focus, do not be scared” she repeated in a chant.

With a steady hand, she placed her favorite history novel onto one of the tall stacks of books. The four stacks, or pillars, supported the lopsided fort. The pillars of history, science, math and writing surrounded the young girl like the night sky to the moon.

A majority of my fondest memories, such as building forts, centered on learning. As I grew older and enrolled into public school, education slowly consumed every aspect of my daily life. Entry into school increased my affinity to learn as much as possible. As time passed and I grew older, the meaning of education remained the same. Education meant to me the ability to enlighten myself, create change, and progress.

History defines the seventeenth century Enlightenment as a cultural revolution. Intellectuals and scholars emphasized the importance of individualism and reason. Education enables people to define themselves as autonomous individuals rather than simply members of a collective whole. Education is an exercise in self-definition because it exposes the individual to many different concepts and points of view. Political philosopher Thomas Hobbes believed that the root of human nature was ultimately evil. In contrast, Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau claimed that human nature was predominantly good. The different ideologies produce a creative tension that empowers students to develop and learn. The student can also weave the ideologies together to create a different philosophy. The individual has the power to define from education what is important to them.

School taught me about legendary philosophers, but more importantly, about myself. Without education, I would have not been able to construct, define, and refine my own beliefs. Without education, I would have not been able to identify as a feminist. Education lies at the heart of what enables me to define my beliefs to others and the world.
Science states that energy can never be destroyed because it is renewable. The same concept applies to knowledge. Knowledge is renewable because it is shared and distributed constantly. For example, the United Nations is an organization that is comprised of various different countries. Representatives from the organization may lack the knowledge to identify corruption within the system. The knowledge is then renewed and instilled within the upcoming generation. The birth of new ideas and leaders provides the world with an influx of change.

Education means that I could become the President and help stabilize the wage gap. Education means that through a new method of strokes and mediums, I could create a different method to paint. Through education, I have the ability to create new ideas. I have the ability to ultimately change the way the world functions. Change is created, whether small or large, by driven individuals. Education gives me the opportunity to understand numerous perspectives, engage in stimulating conversation and contribute to change.

Progress is like an algebraic equation, where x is defined as individualism and y as change. When variables x and y are plugged back into the equation, the formula equals advancement. As the daughter of two immigrant parents, I have learned the importance of motivation and hard work. The difficulties my parents faced taught me from an early age to always place my best foot forwards. Education meant for my mother the ability to progress from working in a laundromat to becoming a controller at Rockefeller University. Education for my father meant the chance to enroll me in a well-known public school to ensure I was receiving the best education possible. Education opens up the opportunity to advance and reach a goal, such as my parents who strove for the “American Dream.” Without education, my mother and father would not have been able to provide for me the best they could. My mother would continue to
work in the laundromat and my father as a dishwasher. Education ultimately empowered my family to succeed in the United States.

The importance of learning has remained the same throughout every phase in my life, especially when I was an experienced fort constructor. The four piles of messy stacked books symbolize the school subjects I enjoy most. As an adult, I was recently assigned one the most important projects of all: my future. As a brave little girl I did not simply build for fun, but for growth. The stacks eventually decreased as I continued to soak in every ounce of knowledge possible.

The meaning of education to me is that it is the source of enlightenment, change, and progress. Education is something that cannot be taken or stolen; it is a gift, like a fort to a young child.