“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.” - William Butler Yeats

Since childhood I was considered academically gifted according to the national and state mandated standardized tests. Learning how to read led me to indulge in this newfound knowledge by joyously reading signs on a road and immersing myself into a children's adaptation of the Bible. Being part of the Gifted and Talented programs for both academics and arts at Lindbergh Elementary School further fueled my love of knowledge. I remember the paintings by Monet, Da Vinci, and Kahlo Mrs. Farber had us, the young artists, endeavor to imitate. I remember Mrs. Doheny telling us, the LEAP students, to deduce and analyze potential evidence and subsequent suspects in an imitation crime scene. I loved these stimulating programs that enabled me to venture beyond the normal pacing of a set curriculum.

After my mother would wait outside my classroom for an hour before school ended, we walked hand in hand back home while I recounted all the marvels discovered throughout the day. Her eyes gleamed with exuberant pride each and every step as I told her how and why levers worked, the stages of a caterpillar's life, and the biochemical properties of plants growing via photosynthesis.

I lost this love for learning when my source of support had crumbled; my mother passed away due to breast cancer when I was eight years old. I no longer had someone who would avidly acknowledge and nurture my yearning intellectual growth as my father was constantly working, my brothers were busy with the riddles of adolescence, and my step mother was unknowingly negligent of my innermost sufferings.
I often looked outside the classroom at the end of the day wishing my mother would be waiting until the weight of my delusional hope became too unbearable. Meeting occasional bullies on my lonely walks home compounded the misery, yet I still managed to move my drudging feet because it was the last redolent activity with my mother imprinted in my mind.

Like the desiccated cornfields during drought season in Kansas, my will to walk ended during high school. The feckless lessons learned from the depths of loneliness to which I had succumbed had instilled in me to relinquish my love for education. Instead of reaching my potential as a student athlete, internalizing the importance of the intricacies of biology, embracing Newton's permeating laws of physics, and espousing the dynamic theories of chemistry, I learned the system only took into consideration what supposed objective test scores represented. I learned that I could suffice by cramming a month's worth of lessons last minute in preparation for an exam. Although I scored average test scores, and thus considered to be comprehending of the course material, the crammed knowledge superfluously leaked towards the invisible air to never be seen again.

I was almost not allowed to graduate high school due to the fact I had not attended the majority of January my senior year. The first day in February when I had returned, Mr. Donald Bergamini, the inexorable figure of authority in Cresskill Jr./Sr. High School whom all the students feared, promised to drive to my home early in the morning if I did not attend school the next day. I greeted him the next morning with nothing but a towel covering my freshly showered body as he parked his ironic black mini-cooper in front of my home; I had to reciprocate his pertinacious act of genuine care with a grotesque sight. He had saved my life as he refused to jettison this wayward and onerous seafarer from the shore seeking ship of truth that is education.
My complacent work ethic was exacerbated during my first two semesters at Bergen Community College when I achieved excellent grades with minimal effort. This time around, I actually completed the assignments on time, but my efforts and academic integrity were like the ephemeral embers of a coal, indistinguishable from its noble, blazing origin. I still adhered to the peremptory and illusory conclusions that the educational system only cared about the letter representations on a piece of paper.

Everything changed in the third semester when I won the United Water Scholarship provided through the BCC Foundation. The award winning topic was about how the completion of the essay itself was a step towards maturation. Since then, I am currently a Peer Mentor for the 123 Connect: FYE Program, student aide for the Office of Specialized Services, contributing writer for The Torch, member of Phi Theta Kappa and S.P.A.R.K. A Change club, and Advocacy Coordinator of the International Affairs Association.

My definition of education has vacillated since childhood, but from the root is the truth as Yeats alludes to. That root is to pursue what I love by absorbing that which makes me grow.