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## Educational Regret Undone

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### Educational Regret Undone

By Vanessa Wamsley

My education disappoints me. I surprise even myself writing that line. But looking back at my post-high school choices, I feel I missed something, somewhere. I missed opportunities. I let potential slip by. I rushed too much. I only understood what I wanted from my education after it was finished.

What an introduction! Here it is, my first column, an education column no less, and I lead with my disappointing education. But I want transparency. I refuse the pretense that I possess the greatest expertise in the field of education. I claim passion for education and experience in pursuing an education and providing an education. I possess a great many opinions regarding problems and solutions for the country's educational system, top to bottom. But an expert I am not. I want to showcase successful educators, failing systems, students of all ages who are changing their world, and educational research and legislation. I will address education in all its facets. First, however, I address educational regret.

My dismay with my education begins and ends where my college education begins and ends. That is, I love everything else in my life. I grew up in a small town in southwest Nebraska where I learned the value of old-fashioned hard work and the camaraderie of a tight-knit community. I dabbled in journalism after college, and then I enjoyed a brief career as a high school language arts teacher. My husband's job in the military means we move frequently, so I explore corners of the country I never imagined I would call home. I travel as often as possible. My two extraordinary children keep me grounded in the simple, important matters of life like glitter glue and pirate battles. And recently, I pounced on the opportunity to start writing again.

So why do I feel chagrin when I look back on that five-year period of my life? My dad, a high school math teacher himself, always told me, "Education is the difference between who you are and who you want to be." So, he said, I only needed to figure out who I wanted to be and seek out the education required to become that best version of myself. Tall orders for a wide-eyed, 17 year-old girl. I missed both orders then. I concerned myself more with getting through college quickly and graduating in less than four years than with examining what I learned and where my learning could take me. I put off deciding what exactly I wanted from a college education because I was afraid if I made a choice, I would fail. I thought it best to marginally succeed at anything than to miserably fail at what I wanted most.

A few years down the line, when my career took a different direction as a stay-home mother, I took some time to mull over that childhood question: What do I want to be when I grow up? Or, for me, what do I want to be when my kids grow up? It took five years. I discovered my answer. I want to be a woman who uses powerful words to educate, to uplift, to point out what is good in the world, to offer solutions for what needs to change. Oh, such a lofty dream, but it is mine nonetheless. In more practical and simple terms, I want to write.

Now to seek out the education required turning me into a powerful user of words. Thankfully, neither my college diploma nor my teaching certificate closes the door on my education. Of course, I can return to school. In fact, I hope someday to earn a higher degree with my eyes firmly fixed on achieving my wildest dream. However, I cannot discount the education that life has given me outside the walls of a classroom. The knowledge I gleaned from my colleagues at the newspapers and schools where I worked adds volumes to the formal education I received. My children teach me patience, selflessness, and fearlessness. Traveling forces me to open my mind to a new food or song or word. Every time I pick up a great book, I learn from a great writer.

In the end, then, my education cannot disappoint me because my great education lies ahead. I regret only having felt regret.

And with this full disclosure, I move on to face those other, weightier topics in education. I welcome open dialogue. I welcome input from educators and students, parents and policymakers, the expert and the novice. I welcome variety of opinion. I welcome all who pursue their lofty dreams through education.

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