

UNTITLED

BY HANNAH HUDSON

Academics have always been a controversial issue in my family. All of my siblings and I were homeschooled for the better part of our K-12 education. My parents, who are both very intelligent and have numerous degrees, were great examples for us to live up to. My mother, who taught us, emphasized academic excellence in her teaching. However she also realized that every person has different areas in which they excel and areas in which they struggle. She was a person who realized the importance of integrating faith and learning, so she always tied everything back in to our Christian lives or the beauty of God's creation.

My oldest sister, Beth, was a genius student who got all A's, graduated salutatorian in her high school, and could learn through any modality. My brother John, the next oldest, was not as gifted in every area. He had ADD and, although an excellent mathematician, he had trouble in English and Spelling.

My other sister, Amy, is a very compassionate person and a good reader. Although math is difficult for her, she excels in English, and since she is a persistent student, her dedication enabled her to make quite high grades. Although I am not as intelligent as Beth, my mother would call me a bright child and growing up I made A's without too much difficulty.

So, as I grew up, the notion of my own intelligence was introduced to me and reinforced by my academic achievements. I am a competitive person and that competitive drive sort of took over as I grew more serious about school; I became obsessed with academic perfection. Because I was homeschooled, I was not challenged to receive a better grade than my classmates, so I only had perfection to compete with. So, doing my best meant achieving a perfect score.

I became more concerned with the number than what I learned. I also didn't like to linger and reflect, because I thought this wasted valuable time, so I also worked as fast as I possibly could. This frustrated my mother because I would always cut our discussions short so I could go "finish my work". She was teaching because she loved it, and in her excitement, would lose track of time. Her motto was time didn't matter as long as we were learning. However, it mattered a great deal to me; I didn't feel the joy she felt and was frustrated at her lack of discipline. She would teach so I could learn; I would do it so I could "check it off the planner".

Upon coming to John Brown University and getting into the Honors Program, I realized that "real classes" were all discussion and the work was done outside of classes. JBU has an atmosphere that fosters thought and discussion. I was fascinated, because the professors as well as the students had the same attitude as my Mom.

Now that I have left her shelter and joined the ranks of university students with other peers of mine, I have discovered that I do have that love of learning that she so desperately wanted me to have. I only wish it could have emerged sooner. During discussions that have been held in Gateway and other classes, the subject of the “integration of faith and learning” has come up. James W. Sire, the author of *Habits of the Mind* especially has shown me about what a Christian intellectual should look like. I was faced with a new challenge. As a Christian, I am commanded to use my mind responsibly. The combination of academia and the intellect never occurred to me.

I felt like a scholar upon coming to JBU because of the formality of discussions but also the seriousness in which intelligent discussions are held. When I was homeschooled, and even in my last two years of high school at an international school, the classroom discussions were very informal and laid back. This rigidity intimidated me but also filled me with pride when I engaged in a discussion and had something useful to add.

Ever since coming to JBU I have experienced a strange reversal of attitude and personality. What I used to value I did not value anymore and I filled my time with things I previously had not engaged in frequently.

It was as if I had become the opposite of myself.

I used to spend my time reading, writing poetry, listening to music and journaling. However, I abruptly quit all of those activities which I no longer “had the time for” in order to pursue a various cacophony of extracurricular activities. I went from being an extreme introvert to acting like an extreme extrovert. I spent about 80% of my time with friends as compared to the previous 20%. I had one extracurricular activity in high school; here I had myriads of things to do so that I was always in a bustle, rushing between classes, work, friends, and activities. This was also new because I had never not had alone time before.

I also grew apathetic in my classes. I still tried to do well, but didn’t give it my usual utmost. I didn’t really care if I made B’s and C’s whereas before I would’ve freaked out. Also, I did not try to better my grades. I participated in class only when I felt like it or the topic interested me. I really enjoyed the learning and discussion, I just didn’t want to do the work.

Maybe it was the disorientation of coming to a new place, living away from family and suddenly being responsible for a number of things. Maybe it was the loss of family support which had pushed me over the edge. Maybe I was homesick but didn’t realize it. Or, maybe I just went through that phase that every college freshman has to deal with: they live at home all of their life with parents who tell them to eat their vegetables and don’t stay up late. Then they become a college freshman and realize that they no longer have to take orders from their parents, and consequently, they go wild and party it up.

All of this happened subconsciously because I didn't really keep in touch with my feelings. I didn't talk about it with my family or write in my journal: I never processed my strange reversal of character or even realized something was wrong.

However, upon my first visit back to see my parents about nine weeks into the semester, I was conversing with them when suddenly something broke inside of me and it all came out, and I started crying. That's when I realized that one can't just abruptly change their character without being affected. I went from being an extreme introvert to acting like an extreme extrovert. But that's just it: it was an act—it wasn't really me.

Now, I feel that these two areas: academic perfection and social involvement used to be on a see-saw. Academic perfection was the fat kid who sat on one side and could never get off the ground because the other kid, social involvement, was so scrawny. After going to college I feel that social involvement has metaphorically gained weight while academic perfection wasted away, so that their proportions were reversed.

Meanwhile, a third aspect, my spiritual life, has pretty much disappeared completely. I go to church when I don't sleep in, or when I'm not out of town at an Ultimate Frisbee tournament. However, since I haven't completely decided which church to regularly attend, it is easy to skip it all-together. I practically never read my Bible, and seldom pray. I never really prayed on my own before coming to JBU either, but we have family devotions every night at home where we would pray together, and I have missed that.

This imbalance in my life has daily effects, which I think I don't attribute to the right causes. If I have a lot of homework, I blame my professor whereas if I had a better attitude, I wouldn't be having a problem. If something bad happens I get all stressed whereas if I had been praying about it, I would have peace.

I did not really want to write this paper because I am a perfectionist and I feel that the problem has to be completely over and solved before I can talk about it. However, as my wise father says, if I stick to those rules, I'd have to be dead before I talked about anything. This problem is still going on for me; I am still struggling with it. This is why I feel a disconnect with Donald Miller, because it seems like he writes from a hindsight perspective and although he was struggling with those issues once, now he has "seen the light" and has no more problems in that area. He feels comfortable writing the book and exposing himself because he has already gone through those stages.

As of right now, I feel that I am not content with who I am. I feel that once I have everything done and finished then I can relax and begin my real life and have a good time. Once this semester is over, and I have finished all of the various projects due and next semester's schedule is finalized, then I'll be happy. But next semester I'll feel the same way. I can't live until I have finished everything. I need to learn to enjoy the journey along the way. I am an extremist. Take my room for an example: either everything is chaotic and I live in a

pigsty, or everything is organized in its proper place. Thinking about it, I realize that life will never be that way until we get to heaven. There will always be a project I'm in the middle of; there will always be a little stress and never enough time to do everything I want. I want to learn to be spontaneous without forgetting my responsibilities. I want everything I do to be for the glory of God. When I work, I want to do my best and not be distracted. When I play, I want to play hard and not withhold anything. I find that I am withholding myself all the time. It is as if I am saving my energy for something, but that something never comes. I have to realize that I have to live for today, because today is all we're ever going to get.

I was discussing with a friend recently about learning and what exactly it is and how we learn. We are such a reward driven society. We don't do things just to learn, we do them to get credit or approval or acknowledgement. We don't choose our classes based on what interests us, we choose them based on what is required to graduate and get a diploma (recognition) and get a job and start earning lots of money. It seems silly, really. College should be enjoyed. It is a privilege and should be treated as such and not a burden. After all, it is not mandatory that we be here, and we are paying lots of money to be here, so why shouldn't we enjoy ourselves while we are here?

If we are always putting off having fun until later, I don't think that fun will ever happen. And this is partially the problem. Who says certain classes have to be a drag? Why can't they be enjoyable? Our attitude determines whether or not we enjoy what we are doing. If we take the attitude that this is work, then we will treat it as such and not enjoy it. However, if we take everything in stride and live in the moment and yes, work but enjoy learning, then we will have a much more satisfactory life.

There are so many great classes that interest me, but I hesitate to take because my mind tells me that I need to get core classes out of the way first, or that taking a class for my major is more important than a certain elective. This is partially correct; after all, a diploma is the end goal most people are trying to achieve. But why is that? Why can't people go to college, yes to get a degree, but also to learn about life, about living in a community, about growing up and becoming your own person? Why don't people come to university to learn about how to relate to others in a healthy way, about how to follow rules, about deep philosophical concepts, and about appreciating others' talents?

Why does it have to be about the grade and not about what you learn? Why can't students honestly work their hardest for their professors and why can't professors encourage the students and give them a break? I guess I'm just frustrated because I feel that some professors will never let up on us, so that makes me feel like doing lousy work.

John Brown's motto is "head, heart and hand" and I think that is beautiful, but even thus emphasized, we tend to forget about it in the daily grind of life. We don't really live it out. It is just something that looks nice on a brochure, at least, I am speaking for myself when I say that. I tend to just focus on the head when I am in class and forget about the other two. Learning is great, but when it is just head knowledge, it isn't worth much. To take effect it has to seep into one's heart and flow out through one's hands in practice. If we learn that loving each other is what we are to do, then that is good, but if we actually put that into practice and loved each other and even showed that in physical ways by serving them, then it would be so much more impactful and honoring to God. Also, when we act things out, we tend to remember the concepts more than if we just stuffed them into a dark corner of our brain and let them sit there.

I want to learn to live in the moment, never looking back and not looking too far forward. I need to learn to take each day as a gift from God, to look upon it as one more chance to do a kindness for somebody. Each day is God's day—not mine. I have to be willing to change my plans and follow his guidance. When you think about others more than yourself, not only are you pleasing God, you get a pleasant satisfaction out of it that is not attainable any other way.

I think that the biggest thing I've learned here at John Brown University is to love learning. I really do enjoy it, whether it is a random fact, or just thinking about a concept. It is the main reason why I have only skipped one class all semester and why I always do my homework. I'm not trying to be a goody-goody. It's just that the information fascinates me. I even read the wellness book. Everyone I've talked to never has, but I think it's good to learn about those areas of knowledge that wellness has to offer. Obviously the Board thinks it's important, otherwise students would not have to take wellness. That's another thing I have to realize. Every class is equally important, because every one has something different to offer. Knowledge is very desirable to me. I not only want to be wise about the ways of the world, I want to be wise about the things of God. Learning to fear and obey Him is the first step and I want to take that first step so that I can become a better student, a better daughter and a better friend. I want follow God so that I can grow closer to Him and walk in his ways. I want to follow Christ and model Him in all that I do: in speech, in action and in love.