

Past Demons and My Power Over Them

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This is a written thesis about my life and how I came to be who I am now. Through revealing this, I can become a more effective teacher for my future students. Well let's start this tale not with who I am but my surroundings, the city of Warren. Warren is just like many other small steel mill towns of Ohio. It has a population of about fifty thousand people, ten thousand of it made up of African-Americans. The reason why I mention race is that it set the background to some of the experiences that I have felt in this town. This town is separated by railroad tracks. With the rich white middle class living on one side and the poor whites and blacks residing on the other side. The reason why this phenomena happen was not because of some underhanded government plot to keep blacks all on one side for some evil secret agenda. This separation happens because of the steel mills. At one time, the only job that a black person could have was working in the steel mills. In the early fifties, the car factories weren't as liberal with jobs as they are now. If you wanted your family to have a descent life, you took what was offered to you. The scenario is set, there are all these poor whites and blacks working at a steel mill that resides on the southwest and southeast side of town, where should they live? Perhaps way across town in there own little neighborhood away from the smelly steel mill or lets move them as close to their primary job as possible. The latter is the obvious answer that explains why we lived where we lived.

Switching back to the whole town perspective if you don't live near them, you don't have to interact with them. Therefore, we all had separate lives and in time, we

were conditioned that you don't go in certain parts of town. With this conditioned mind set in most people of Warren living here is a very restrictive living situation. There are certain businesses that I don't patronize still now in two thousand and two because of the feelings I can remember as child and the lack of good service.

My family was comprise of my father and Mother and seven other brothers and sisters. We can first start by analyze the patriarch of the family. My father was born in nineteen twenty-three in Cleveland, Ohio. He was an orphan and second oldest of five brothers and sisters. They were orphaned at an early age and thrust in the foster care system. They were luckily not separated by the system and raised in a semi-loving environment. My fathers foster parents later moved to Warren to work in the steel mills for a better life. This explains how my father came to live in this beautiful town. In his twenties, he was then called out to perform his patriotic duty and serve his country in World War 2. He served his country proudly honorable as a true American. When the war was over he then married his first wife and begot four children. They later divorced and he married my mother. My mother was from a small town in southern Alabama where her people were sharecroppers for a family. She was born in nineteen thirty-three the youngest of twelve child. They later moved to Alliance, Ohio because her father wanted a better life working in the steel mills. She was the first person in her family to graduate from high school and she had plans of going to college to pursue a nursing career but that dream ended when her parents informed her that they couldn't afford to pay for college. With dreams destroyed she did what all of her family was doing she went to work as housekeep to help her family. She then married the father of my other three brothers and sisters and moved to Warren. They shortly separated and she was lift

to raise three young children on her own with no help. She was forced to move into the projects and started back to doing the job she most hated doing and that was housekeeping. Her first husband died and at the funeral, she met my father he worked part time at a funeral home. With this relationship, they sired me. I was born in nineteen seventy-two. Growing up I was never very close to my other brothers and sisters. The age rift could have been the reason why I never became close to them. So, I've always felt a little lonely when it comes to family.

The school system of Warren did consist of two high schools, three junior high schools, and ten elementary schools. I attended Horace Mann elementary school, which happen to be primarily all black. I can remember my first day of school as if it was yesterday. I was so excited about going that just couldn't sleep it felt like it was Christmas Eve. I thought that there was going to be a nice teacher that was going to show me how to read, write, and be as exciting as Sesame Street. Was I in for a shock she was one of the meanest persons I've ever met. When I got there all of the other kids had attended preschool, and I hadn't this made me a year behind. Therefore, I had to play catch up with everyone and I had the teacher from hell. From this point on, I found that I really couldn't stand being in school. I got in fights all the time and was ridicule publicly because I couldn't keep up with the "The Letter People" show. When I was finally sent to the corner for the hundredth time, I thought to myself when will this end. It finally did end we had summer break and I was free once again.

This leads me into first grade. This was the first time we were tracked into learning groups. We had Rabbits, which was the smart kids, and the Frogs, which were the average kids that could comprehend but not as swiftly as the Rabbits. Then there was

my group the Turtles we were the children that couldn't comprehend without the mockery of the teacher. We were the ones that got busy work while the rest of the class was allowed to have free time. This situation made me very angry so I lash out at the other students. I was on my way to becoming a bully, to help compensate for my lack of intellectual strength. This simple change in attitude caused something to happen to me that I will never forget, flunking the first grade. Throughout the rest of my schooldays, I will always be haunted by what happened to me then. Flunking a student improperly is one of the most humiliating things that can happen to a child. Its sting leaves a lasting mark that never heals.

When fourth grade came around, I was known for being a terror in the classroom. I was always receiving corporal punishment for any infraction of the rules. During this time, my reading problems worsened. I fell further behind with my reading development and no one seemed to care they were only concerned with my behavior. One of the methods that were employed was through the process of name-calling. Whenever she felt that she had to control me, she would resort to calling me Big Byrd. This was extremely traumatic for me because there I was with a reading disability and the only person that could help me ridiculed me. I truly felt betrayed she was supposed to teach me not torment me. At that time I hated her because she just didn't understand that my acting out wasn't done out of malice toward her but it was my way of crying out. I can remember a time when we were having a career day. This was the assignment in which we were supposed to choose a job we would like to have when we grow up. I loved dinosaurs at the time so I was naturally going to become a paleontologist. So when we

all stood up before the class and presented or dreams she single me out and told me to give it and think about a career where I could use my hands not my brain.

The school final did send some help. I was tested for a reading disability and was found deficient in that development. This did solve my reading dilemma but not all because it presented a new image of me as the slower learning child. During that time of social development, many boys go through a stage called the gang age, which is a stage in development where boys form groups of bonding. I was in a slower class for half a day this cause me to be single out, excluded from certain groups, and presented me with more tribulations. These tribulations weren't nearly as bad as what I went through in the fourth grade. The person that made my life just a little bit better was my special education teacher. She was an effective teacher because she did what no other teacher did she gave me respect. When she gave me that I did something I've never done, I tried to learn. At the beginning, I was reading at a second grade level. When the class ended, I was at a fourth grade level of reading. This was a major accomplishment for me and I was so proud that I made her happy.

Junior high school was supposed to be a brand new start for me. I was moving to a larger school with completely different teachers and very different attitude. My experience in elementary had beaten me up so bad mentally that I began to hate school. I hated it so much I became a hypochondriac. Most of the school year, I stayed home and watched television. This action causes me to fall further behind cognitively speaking. Therefore, my grades started to drop along with my attendance. I can remember many of my teachers proclaiming " Nice of you to join us today Mr. Byrd". This was just another excuse not to come back to school. This period in my life also became one of my darker

periods. This was about the time I began contemplating suicide as the only alternative. I began to fantasize about just ending it all because my life wasn't getting any better. At this age in life we don't see the light at the end of the tunnel we only see the darkness around us. Therefore, one day I borrowed my fathers gun and wrote on a piece one simple word goodbye. I put the gun to my head and pulled the trigger. Thank God, nothing happened. I forgot to take the safety off first. After that episode, I knew that I had to find an outlet for my pain. Therefore, my therapy became my art. Whenever I felt down and thought that I couldn't carry, on I would just start to draw my feelings and this would help. It got me through those dark years and it helped me pass over them. I loved art so much I joined the art club, which gave me a reason to come to school.

The beginning of my experience with high school was like no other. High school seemed like the end of the world, as we knew it. I just didn't fit in with the students that went there. I was labeled this time as a nerd. I wasn't in to team sports and I wasn't a brain. I was just one of those below average kids that never caused any problems and never did any work. Therefore, it was easy for me to fall through the cracks and wad my way through it all. These were also some depressing times because I had no social outlets. I had very few friends because most clicks are form during the junior high schools years. Therefore, I kept to myself and focused on perfecting my art. My grades were horrible during my years in high schools I averaged about 2.1 GPA. Therefore, I never thought that I would go to college. My junior year one teacher did peak my interest in pursuing a career in art and the only method for doing so was to go to college. Therefore, I went barreling down to the counselors office and asked what kinds of classes I would need to enter into a four college. From then on, I saw my dream and I felt that it

was achievable. My senior year I applied for a college and was accepted as a student. This was one of the most exciting days of my life because I knew that once I left hellish high school I was never coming back.

I could go on about the misadventures of my colleges but I won't. These pages have allowed me to see what kinds of experiences I will be bringing when I start to teach on a full time level. Some of these emotions I've already brought to my students during my three years of fulltime substitute teaching. So now, I know what my past demons are and I have power over them.

Education is our passport to the future, for
tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for
it today.

Malcolm X