

The alarm tones and I awaken.
Another beautiful day has presented itself to me.
I gather my books and pencils, grab a banana and juice and I'm out the door.
I smoked pot again last night,
I'm heading east on Bonnybrook Drive to Mrs. Godfrey's 3rd grade class.
I rush to the bathroom to wash my face and realize that my eyes are still blood-shot from last night-ugh!
I enter the classroom, sneeze, and declare that allergy season has just arrived-phhh.
Today's discussion: family.
Mine, not so pleasant.
Grandma and Grandpa: SUPER Mormon.
Dad's hooked on everything but phonics, and mom's a recovering alcoholic who has recently had an aneurysm and is now in a wheelchair. Older brother: high school drop-out. Sister: bookworm.
Me: I love school because it keeps me away from family and gives me something productive to do.
After school I like to ride my bike. It's actually not mine; I stole it from my brother's friend; the seat's WAY too high.
Hmmm, maybe that man with a tool bag can help.
I ride up, screech the brakes to grab his attention, succeed, and he walks toward me.
I don't recognize him from church, but he seems nice enough.
I point at the seat and politely ask him to fix it.
He does, and we sit to talk for a while.
Today I met Richard Neelson, my best friend, academic mentor, French tutor, fellow coin collector, and proxy father.

~ ~ ~

I'm beginning to grow up and we've moved for a second time.
Now we're in Kearns and I'm going to school at South Kearns Elementary – 6th grade.
My teacher, Mrs. Moore, is really smart and talks a lot about how important an education is.
I often skip recess because I want to read just a little while longer.
I raise my hand all the time and she calls on me because I'm "the smart one in class."
The others envy me because I'm always right – she gives me candy to prove it.
I love school because it gives me an escape from home life, and I feel happy here.

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7th grade is a trip!
Now I actually have homework and have 5 minutes to walk to another classroom?
There really *are* a lot of Mexicans here, AWESOME!
I make friends quickly and begin to learn *español*.
Grandma doesn't like it because we're in America – where only English is spoken – phh!
In 8th, I begin to teach Ulysses, the new kid from Acapulco, how to speak English and to take notes on what the *maestro* is saying.
We get out of class early today because we have parent-teacher conferences tonight.

Grandpa always comes to these and buys me new books.
Like always, the teachers compliment my grandfather on such a “smart young man,” and advise that I start planning for college. I nod my head to be nice, but silently laugh because I know that my family could never afford it.

In health class we learned about how babies are made. THEY SHOWED US PICTURES!
Our teacher says that a man falls in love with a woman and they go on a date and finally they have a kid.

Wow! I guess that’s how everyone does it.

You get baptized at 8, receive the priesthood at 12, go on a mission at 19, return when you’re 21, and get married as soon as possible so that you can raise 9 kids.

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In high school, I begin to take algebra and Spanish 1.

I’m really enjoying this material!

Cooking class is my favorite!

I stay after to read up on Geography and study my vocab. for Spanish.

There are many nights that I don’t go to sleep – I’m just too interested in this book!

~ ~ ~

After 12 long years of hard work and dedication, I get a small sheet of white paper which reads, “Diploma; Nicholas Zachary Pell; June 2009.”

Phew, I made it!

~ ~ ~

I move back to grandpa’s because he lives closer to Salt Lake Community College.

Maybe I *should* look into taking a couple of classes here.

I’m not working; the government will pay for it.

I’ll take English and Math while I wait a year until I turn 19, then I’ll go on a mission.

English 1010 seems like a lot of work, but I’m ready for this!

Spanish 2010 me es más difícil que pensaba. I learned so much new vocabulary and grammar that I began having *actual* conversations with people, instead of just cordially regurgitating “hola” and “¿cómo estás?”

Dang! There are *a lot* of hot guys here!

By the way grandpa, I’m gay.

Church went out the window. The family shunned me.

Well, at least I have more time to devote to college; still not working. I don’t hang out at home a lot.

I became “the other” that Jonathan Stowers spoke of in my Spanish class.

They give me dirty looks and whisper, “fag.” It hurts!

I stopped going to Institute because Brother Miller said that I was going to Hell for my *choice*.

At least I didn’t have to pretend any longer. (Ahhhhhhhh!)

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Classes are getting more difficult, but I’m learning a lot!

I have Sundays to study and I have tons of time to date.

I get to speak up in class because I have a lot of answers and my points are well-taken.

~ ~ ~

I'm working a lot now both at K.F.C. and DirecTV.

School is taking a back seat.

I'm barely passing my classes because I'm so tired from having worked the night before that I rarely attend.

I'm still not at home a lot, but that's how I want it.

I don't want to deal with grandma being ornery all of the time!

I stay up really late to complete my papers, finish reading the chapters, and am driven only by self-motivation; I want a better life.

I *am* going to graduate in spring of 2012 with an Associates degree in General Studies—**even if it kills me!!**

Eulogy to education:

Yes, I have taken all that you have taught;
And placed it in my bag and kept it safe.
From it I will retrieve the tools I'll need;
To carry me to distant lands and teach me more.

A sponge I am to soak up all you say;
A pupil, as it were, in life; to learn and grow each day.
I learn of you and you of me both teachers in the same.
We have a bond, a pact, a curse 'till death to learn.

Yet, as we learn, our young selves die;
And we move on to gather more.
No longer can we hide and seek.
For toads and fairies are not welcome here.

“Open, and expand beyond the box,” they say
Look farther forward, see the Truth and live.
I read, I write, I talk, I hear, and yet;
I hear wings of fairies flutter in my ear.

- Nicholas Pell 2011