

WRITERS' HISTORIES

Editor's Note

In "The Most Powerful Weapon," Emily Goldin examines the difficulty assessing the progress she made as a writer. However, she finds that when the effectiveness of her essay's message is given attention, nothing is more rewarding than hearing how her own voice is powerful and passionate. While reading, notice how Goldin uses a unique approach by quoting from a work written in high school. Does the quotation from her past work provide a more thorough experience for the reader? Goldin's concluding paragraph addresses what writing "will always produce"; note how her final message moves the essay's purpose forward while simultaneously describing an experience attainable for all readers.

The Most Powerful Weapon**Emily Goldin**

"And tomorrow, I'll assign you your first essay." As far back as I can remember, there were no words so shrieking and painful to my ears. Stomachaches, nausea, shaking, mood swings, and tears come to mind all too quickly, when looking back at the years I worked to perfect this thing called writing. It almost sounds laughable. Perfecting writing? That in itself explains my life long battle, not only as writer, but also as a person. Perfectionist to the core, I would sit and struggle to understand how *anyone*, let alone myself, could be capable of perfectly arranging words to transform the abstract, emotional thoughts and opinions in the depths of our infinitely complex minds, into descriptive, concrete words. But through time, I must say, I have learned. Each brainstorm and each essay evoked some sort of power in me, like some new weapon I had, some kind of confidence I did not understand until I read through what I, alone, had composed. I believe though, that it was two particular years in high school, two incredibly difficult ones, which have allowed me to come to that raw perspective, through which I now see my writing.

I always saw writing and reading as inseparable. One just went with the other. And, if there is one thing I truly hate, like that I will never opt to do without someone forcing me to do it, it's reading. Now, I understand how upsetting that is to most people. Maybe it's just that I have yet to find that one book I couldn't put down, that one that plunged me far into an endless love for reading, but either way, I just really don't like it. Therefore, you can imagine my joy upon entering the required British Literature class my junior year of high school. That whole class was basically my worst nightmare; however, one particular assignment comes vividly to mind: my first term paper. Now, I had written papers before, you know, four to five page essays in response to books I had read or just expressing my opinion about a certain thing. But never had

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I seen criteria like this. It had to be ten to twelve pages in length, it had to have at least six sources, all of which would be quoted from in my paper, it had to involve these crazy ass British literature stories I did not care about, *and* it was worth something like forty percent of my grade. That was not to mention all the unbelievably extensive requirements on citing, quoting, paragraph arrangement, and paragraph content. I was in way, way over my head. We had classes that were designated for researching, but I could not even come up with a topic sentence to know where to begin my research. I came home every other night, on the days I had literature, and watched tears drip off my face and onto the rubric I was staring at, thinking, "How am I going to do all of this?" I lacked confidence in my ideas, in my organization, and in my knowledge of what the hell I was trying to say. I distinctly remember having over eighty pages of research and articles, which I had read and highlighted, that I threw away because I changed my thesis so many times. Finally, it just came down to time. I had none, so I had to come up with something. I spent many, many hours and late nights working on that paper, finally turned it in, and received an "A-". It was with that grade on my paper and an "A" in British Literature that I approached my senior year English classes.

With much anticipation to graduate, I prepared myself for the two hardest English classes I would take during high school, but I was confident that they would challenge me to the greatest extent and better my writing for the future. One was called Tragic Hero. I will not even go there. We read "Hamlet" and "Oedipus." And, given what you now know about my love for reading, I'm sure I do not need to explain my experience reading Old English Shakespeare. The other class was never referred to by its actual name, Critical Composition: College Writing, only by the wonderful phrase, the hardest class at Chaminade High School. You may think coming out of my junior year with such unexpected success would have prepared me for this class. Nope. All we did was write . . . and write and write and write. When I walked up to turn my final essay in that I worked intensely on for two and half weeks, I would simply place it on top of the pile and pick up the sheet that explained the *next* essay. It was dreadful. My eyes would begin to sting and water after spending hours staring a computer screen with barely half a page of writing on it, not knowing what to write next, but it was through the process of writing the four major essays assigned in that class that I grew the most as a writer. I learned how to organize quickly, how to research effectively with legitimate, credible sources, how to find the quotes that spoke most strongly to what I was trying to say, how to be bold, how to criticize and refute things I did not agree with, how to pull words and hidden messages out of a mere image in a magazine, how to engage my readers, and most importantly, how to have confidence in my natural ability to write effectively. I have Ms. Poole, my teacher, to thank

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for that. She pushed *hard* and she never let up or allowed us to settle for anything that was not our strongest writing. She taught me to question every sentence. How can I improve this sentence? What can I add to this? Does it fit? Can you transition in and out of it? Does it say what you want it to say? I can still hear her voice ringing in my mind.

One class day, a few weeks after we turned in our “Statement of Position” essay, she called our attention to the front of the room and read, “Something Else Died Too.” It sounded familiar. It took me a minute to comprehend what was going on, but I realized she was beginning to read *my* essay as an example of an “A” essay. She continued,

There is something to be said about a nation that has obtained such success that it creates, in its citizens, the ability to take *freedom* for granted; the privilege that, throughout all of history, has driven entire nations to fight until death. We are one of the few countries in the world that has been content and satisfied with the freedoms granted to us by our government. And yet, while we understand through history books, that our freedom has not come to us *freely*, we continuously lose sight of the true value of this virtue. The reason why is quite simple: we have rarely felt that our freedom was being seriously threatened.

I wrote that essay in response to September 11th, to take a stance, and to make a point that as a result of the invasive tactics drawn out in the Patriot Act, our civil liberties were not only being threatened by the terrorists, but by *our very own government*. I have never been more proud than in that moment when I heard, from someone else’s mouth, the beautiful, powerful essay I had written. Tears welled up in my eyes.

That was only one essay. They would not all be like that; that I knew. Each essay takes heart, effort, and so, so very much work to create. I have always been a good student. I have always worked hard and expended my entire effort on each assignment I am given. Unfortunately, it does not work the same with writing. Hard work does not necessarily guarantee results. There are two things however, that writing will always produce: pride and undying satisfaction. Those two achievements are more fulfilling than any “A” I have ever received . . . and that’s coming from a perfectionist.

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