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Mr. Corbo's Sixth Grade Class
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A Defining Moment in my academic career

As I sit down to type this 'essay', the music and lyrics from Air Supply's 1980 hit "All Out of Love" is stuck in my head.

Visual Trackers

As a corp member in Teach for America, during institute in Arizona, we learned about visual trackers. How wonderful they are, giving students agency and a way to see progress. I understood this basic concept as all children want to feel loved and adored. Most want to do what ever it takes to please the adult authority figure.

Mr. Corbo

Getting into Mr's Corbo's sixth grade classroom was a milestone in the life of a gifted student in Neptune, NJ. He was fun, smart, and challenging. I played my first text based game on a real computer and he drove his classic Corvette on to the playground to teach us how to change oil in a car. And if we made it through the school year until Spring we'd even have a chance to build and fly rockets.

Math

Mr. Corbo took giant white poster board and created a grid of black squares that correlated to our math goals. These were outside of our normal math lessons. These were self driven assignments based on worksheets that were pre-printed and readily available when you had time and were finished with other work. They began easily with simple multiplication problems and our class chart began to fill up like the most wonderful academic rainbow.

Of course, being competitive, I tried best I could to complete more worksheets than anyone else. I could use this chart to silently show everyone how smart I was, finally getting the recognition I deserved without having to brag. So far, so good.

Christmas Break

As usual my parents fought. There was nothing unusual about that. This fight however occurred in the day time. In my shared bedroom with my sister. I don't remember where I was when I heard my mother fall. She was most likely drunk, but I could not realize that until I was much older. All I overheard was the struggle, the bang, the sudden quiet. I sensed my father retreat to his room. My sister left. She had been trending on the side my father lately. (I assume she switched loyalties as it suited her. I remember it happening, I just don't have any evidence of it occurring. We never spoke about it.)

New Clothes

I was wearing new clothes, however I was barefoot. I remember the chill on my bare foot on the street, but that happened later.

I ran to my room to see my mother lying on my bedroom floor. She wasn't moving and I thought perhaps she was dead. I called out to her and then my father. He and my sister ignored me. I screamed again, please, please come back, she's on the floor. I thought I heard my father or my sister say she was faking it. But she wasn't moving. Her eyes were open wide, glossed over and not focusing. I don't know where I learned that people that are unconscious can choke on their tongue, but I put my hand under my mother's head to lift it so she wouldn't choke and I quickly discovered she was lying on a pool of blood. My hand now covered with the evidence that would rouse my father into action, I stormed off screaming at him. He and my sister came running, they got ice. No comforting words for her or me. I ran to the phone in the kitchen and bloodying the receiver I dialed 911.

Betrayal

I ran outside to wait for the ambulance. I ran to get my neighbors. I must have because how else would they know to be outside. They waited with me. My frozen feet on the blacktop. My mother was brought to Jersey Shore Medical Center but they would not allow me to go in the ambulance with her. I was so angry. Wasn't I the responsible one that saw her as needing assistance? Wasn't I the one that called 911? No respect.

School

Ok, yes, this essay is about school. Going back to school. My mother went to Carrier Clinic for Christmas and my birthday over winter break. I remember showing up to visit, she made me a leather belt. I felt guilty because I wanted to buy a snow man 'gum holder' from the gift shop that one of the

patients had her eye on. I remember my pink fluffy boots and the young man (inpatient) who was flirting with me in the hallway (a foreshadowing to my dating career).

Back to School

I had a black no-name hoodie that I took from the church rummage sale. (No, we didn't purchase it, my mother 'worked' the set up, so I would take what I needed without anyone questioning it.) It was a little too big, but it was soft and I loved it. I wore it every day. I didn't brush my hair. (We didn't have a brush for my hair that worked anyway. The only brush we owned was best for 'fine' hair like my mother and sister. I had painful tangles and rat's nests.) Relief from brushing my hair was welcome.

Mr. Corbo

Mr. Corbo noticed something was wrong. My colors stopped. The visual tracker I loved had turned into a reminder of the shame and guilt I had about not having any energy to do extra work. I was depressed, and I didn't know it. Brave Mr. Corbo took me outside the classroom and asked what was wrong. I hesitated, but I knew how smart he was and face to face he would know I was lying. I was also unprepared for the one on one attention, being raised to keep my head low and not talk about home. So I took a chance and told him exactly what happened. (I had tried once before in fourth grade to tell my teacher what was going on at home, but nothing changed for me after that.)

Progress Report

This was defining moment in my academic career as my drive and determination waned after that moment. I never truly got it back until much later, in my adult life. Too late to have an award winning high school and college experience, getting into an Ivy League school and curing cancer.

My plan permanently off track, I gave up. Mr. Corbo filled out a progress report in triplicate and sent it home with me. "Amy's progress in academics will improve when her home life gets better." I was afraid to show my parents, but I was also proud that an adult recognized what was going on and put it in writing, in an official document, in blue ink. I had to get it signed. It was my progress report. (I still have it, I need to find it to accompany this story as an image.)

THE END