

Student Name

Instructor Name

English 312

Date

### The Gift of Education

Whenever I call home, my mom always asks about my dating life, and my dad always asks about my grades. Sometimes, it frustrates my brothers and me that he doesn't seem to care about our social, church, and athletic lives as much as he cares about our academics. This isn't to say that he doesn't care at all, but our schooling is definitely at the forefront of his mind. I recently sat down to interview him about why he's so concerned with how we're doing in school. To my surprise, he said, "The point is not how you're doing in school, but how you're doing in learning. I want you to be getting the best education possible, and while grades are a good indicator, they aren't everything. I want to know if you're learning." I had previously supposed that my dad wanted us to get good grades so that he could be proud of us and be sure that his money was being spent wisely. Through the interview, the truth came out: my dad's biggest regret in life is not getting more education, and he has worked all his life to give me the gift that he could never afford to get himself.

Growing up as the oldest of seven children, my father went to small-town Utah public schools all the way through high-school graduation. His family was not wealthy or particularly happy, and learning became his escape. "I realize now," he said, "that the level of education I received back then was very poor compared to what you had, but it inspired a hope in me that I could be better, and that I could rise above my family life." As an elementary schooler, my dad quickly rose to the top of his classes, and felt validated by the praise he received from teachers and fellow students. The concepts surrounding math and science came easily to him, but it was his study of other cultures and far-off places that caused him to dream of leaving his mundane suburban

existence and settling down in a big city. Even at this young age, he understood that education was the key to his escape plan, and that he would have to work very hard to be able to attend university. “Education,” in his words, “gives you opportunities, and the idea and taste of something more. Education is addictive, especially when you know you might not be able to have more, because it empowers you. It literally makes you stronger, more capable, and more in control of your future.”

My father was bright, but more importantly, he was motivated. He split his high school life between academics and part-time jobs to help with family bills and car payments, developing a great love for chemistry and economics. Just before graduation, both Stanford University and BYU offered him full scholarships. “I would have loved to go to Stanford—it was everything I had dreamed of—but I didn’t have the money to pay for housing, books, and other necessities, so I chose BYU, where I could save money for a mission, by living at home,” he said. “I found a new dream: to return to Stanford one day, to earn my master’s degree.” He worked tirelessly through college at classes and side jobs, paying his way and planning his future. Once he returned from his mission, he quickly married my mother, and she had me.

When my dad graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree, he was supporting a pregnant wife and a child. He knew he would have to work for a few years before he could even consider a master’s program, as he was now the sole provider for our growing family. He accepted a job at an information systems company, and his focus shifted from his lifelong dreams of education to new dreams of career and family. The idea of a master’s degree still lingered in the back of his mind, and he hoped that maybe a future employer would help pay for a program. Life went on—my parents’ third child was born, and we moved from Dallas, Texas to Tokyo, Japan, for what was supposed to be a two-year contract. Twenty years later, my brothers and I have all graduated from high school in Japan, and my parents continue their lives there. It has become our home. My father has enjoyed a successful career in investment banking, and many rich experiences that he said he “could never

have dreamed of as a child in small-town Utah.” However, he said, “My very biggest regret in life, the one thing that I would do differently if I could live all over again, is that I never got my master’s degree. And I still want it. I still think about it all the time.”

Growing up, I had never realized that this was my father’s most important regret. If I had to guess, there are a million other things I would have said, but this is not one of them. His greatest fear is that his children will be prevented from obtaining the educations that they want and need to be successful and to feel capable throughout life. Much of his planning and saving has revolved around this fear and worry, and he has worked tirelessly to ensure that it never becomes a reality.

I asked my dad if he had any last thoughts on my education, or anything he wanted to express before we closed the interview. He sat in silence for a moment. “Education is a gift. Education is a struggle. It’s something I worked very hard for, and I still work hard for. I used to work for my education, and now I work for yours,” he said thoughtfully, “and I hope you understand and appreciate it as I do, as my gift to you.” And Dad, now I do.

Work Cited

Last Name, First Name. Personal interview. Date.