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Getting There

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“Getting There” by Aubrey Gillette

Instructor’s Notes

This essay is an example of a Literacy Memoir. The instructor asked Aubrey and her classmates to write an essay that explored how a literacy event made a lasting impact on the writer’s life. Often times a school assignment becomes more meaningful than we could ever have imagined. How does Aubrey’s high school composition assignment allow her to discover important ideas about herself, her goals in life, and her future? How do the two “desk” scenes that Aubrey represents in the essay demonstrate her maturing process to readers? Why might this personal essay have value for a reader?

Writer’s Biography

Aubrey is a sophomore Psychology major from Grand Rapids, Michigan. She loves learning, especially through reading, and she collects lessons from the mentors in her life. Aubrey enjoys both long distance mission trips and local adventures in the great outdoors. Her highest priorities in life include her relationships with her Creator and with her loved ones.

Getting There

Hundreds of little feet ran down the dry, orange dirt road, eager to get to the clinic. The muggy air did not prevent the children from hustling across the rocks and mud into town.

“Muzungu! Muzungu!” the mass of children yelled, referring to the white people they spotted through the crowd.

The muzungus, Americans, constructed a small clinic to remove jiggers—nasty flea-like critters—by jabbing a metal surgical utensil through layers of skin and tearing out the bugs from their little feet before providing them with shoes to wear home. Wherever their home was. Some of these feet walked home to small huts. Others were not so fortunate. Many of the children would return to

the orphanage up the road, after they received their brand new pair of shoes. Regardless of their direction, those small, sore feet would take baby steps the whole way.

Over 7,000 miles away, in an air-conditioned home, I sat in a swivel desk chair with my feet grazing the carpet as I kicked them back and forth under the computer desk. Amidst my endless contemplation of millions of little feet around the world searching for a home, I found myself taking baby steps of my own. I read about the jigger clinics in Uganda in my free time because of my interest in third-world missions and medical relief. Little did I know that my interest in missions would connect to the research paper I was writing about international adoption. In my composition class, I was assigned to research a topic that had major societal implications. After researching, I was required to write a persuasive essay explaining why my reader should or should not choose, in the case of my topic, international adoption.

Hours a day sitting at the wood desk in my home office, staring at the blurry white computer screen and looking for just the right article to suit my topic left me bewildered, lost even. I felt immobilized by the statistics before my eyes; the situation was worse than I thought. Researching international adoption turned out to be a life-altering experience for me at the age of seventeen, just one year older than the cut-off for adoption.

In the afternoons between school and work, I felt exhausted during the hours of staring at the computer screen. I selected research articles, found applicable quotations, and worked towards figuring out how to put them into a logical sequence that would articulate the point I was trying to make: that Americans should make international adoption a priority.

On one particular afternoon, I sat in my home office with *Bonanza*, *Gunsmoke*, or some other old western television show playing on the T.V. to the left. My dad relaxed in the leather chair behind me at his glass top desk, snacking on cheese and crackers, eyes glued to the T.V. screen in the corner. I felt an overload of distraction in the room, but I had to focus so that I could type. I struggled to coax my overwhelming feelings out through my fingers and onto the computer keyboard. I wanted to express the ache I felt for the shoeless, homeless, motherless, and fatherless children of this world. I clicked my black Paper Mate pen continuously while

I thought, scribbling out bad ideas and jotting down thoughts that would help me convey a feeling that words could hardly describe. It was a messy process, characterized by many long afternoons staring at a pile of papers and hoping for the ability to make sense of the statistics and case studies. While I dug through piles of research, children around the world were digging through piles of trash that must have reeked of animal carcasses. They were searching for any small piece of edible substance they could find. Those children were wandering the streets as I wandered the Internet, both of us searching, but for different resources.

“Dad, can you turn the T.V. down? My brain hurts,” I murmured.

Before putting another cracker in his mouth, the old man grumbled, “Yeah, sure. How long are you going to need the computer? I have to check my email.”

My dad: always preoccupied and rarely concerned. In that moment I wished I could tell him how much importance this project had in my heart, but he would never understand. He sat comfortably in our home, surrounded by a fair amount of money and few medical concerns. I doubted if he ever cared about the sick, poor, and needy people that lived half a world away. I also feared his imminent discouragement of the route I wanted to take in life, the route towards counseling and providing physical and emotional care for the needy. He would never be the muzungu that showed up in an African village to remove jiggers from the feet of crying children, and he would never want me to be that muzungu either.

I determined in that moment to reject my father’s negative opinion. I invested my emotions into my research project. From that point on, I would take baby steps toward the mission field. One night, a few weeks after the day in the home office with my dad, I was sitting cross-legged on my cozy twin bed, studying articles about orphans. During my reading, I resolved to adopt one or two African babies someday. My dad would not like it, but that would not restrict me.

Maybe, I thought to myself, by making African babies his grandchildren, I could somehow influence his opinion in the future.

The statistics, the stories, and the faces of little motherless children made my skin itch with discomfort, causing me to squirm atop my bed.

I cannot tolerate this. I cannot accept the reality that so many children are living without parents while Americans, myself included, sit in contentment.

Baby steps, I decided. Baby steps would take me to those children and lead me to the opportunity of loving them with more than just knowledge of them. I would love them with my hugs and my words, and I would use whatever abilities I could to change their lives, even if that meant adopting them as my own.

After a couple of months of investing my time and energy into researching international adoption, I still found myself working for hours at the desk in my home office. The more interested I had become in the topic, the more I longed to act. I was finally writing the persuasive essay, which meant sitting in the desk chair with my face nearly pressed against the screen as I typed carefully, eager to include the most precise words that would support my argument. This was not just any old research project my blonde, middle-aged, intimidatingly strict Advanced Placement Language and Composition teacher assigned. Not anymore. Rather, it grew into an opportunity for me to gain an understanding of the lifestyle I chose to pursue. My desire grew from wanting to make the needs of the poor and fatherless known to wanting to spend much of my future meeting those exact needs. My focus was no longer about the topic of international adoption. It was so much more. Adoption, missions, human trafficking, medical relief, and world hunger filled my thoughts during those final days of essay revision and nit picking.

Upon completion of this five-month research assignment, I began taking baby steps toward my future career. I committed to studying cross-cultural Psychology at Cedarville University to develop more awareness of people from other cultures and backgrounds. I also aspired to involve myself in ministry, no matter my age or location. This aspiration would lead to the opportunity for mission involvement. I would take baby steps: first be active in a church and other ministries through college, next keep my ears open for the chance to take part in a trip or project, then go.

As a result of taking these ministry baby steps, I have had epiphanies and discoveries while sitting at my desk. However, I have moved on to a desk of my own. I no longer sit at the desk in my parents' house with my dad observing my research. Now, my desk is my safe place. I make my own decisions while sitting there

in my small, white-wall dorm room.

I made one big decision on a brisk Thursday morning near the end of January. I sat with a cup of black coffee in my hand, reading my Bible, which lay open on my desk. Upon finishing my reading, I closed my eyes to pray.

Lord, keep me on the narrow path, I prayed, referring to Matthew 7:14.

Suddenly it dawned on me.

The narrow path leads to Uganda.

In that moment, I committed to traveling to Uganda during the summer of 2014, just another step on my way to a life of cross-cultural ministry. My research project during the second semester of my senior year of high school stimulated more than knowledge of international adoption. My life plans developed during that time. I realized that I want to be more than a Psychologist who works in America with middle and upper class Caucasians discussing their battles with depression and marriage tensions. I learned I could do so much more, including global missions, counseling human trafficking victims, or even partnering with a non-profit organization to do counseling in jigger relief clinics.

Although my upcoming mission trip is not through Sole Hope, the organization providing jigger relief and shoes to children in Uganda, I hope to experience a similar atmosphere to that of their clinic scenes. I long to hear the children shouting with excitement, to play soccer and dance and sing with them. I found my life goal through my research on international adoption.

I want to be the reason children shout “Muzungu!”