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## My 104,000-Dollar Summer

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# My 104,000-Dollar Summer

*Gregg Mendel*

“Pencils down!” yelled the test instructor. I had just finished the math portion of the ACT, and I had no idea how I had done. “Hope that was good enough” I said to myself as I crammed a granola bar in my mouth. That was my lunch for the day, since the ACT only allows 5 minute breaks in their 3-hour test. I can’t say I wasn’t nervous for this test, since my whole future relied on getting a good score. Reaching this point had been one of the hardest things I have ever done. What I had learned and how it had changed me was amazing, but I had no time to think about that; the English section was up next. “Pencils up!”

Two years ago I wouldn’t have known the difference between the ACT test and the second ACT of a play, and I couldn’t care less. Back then I possessed absolutely no work effort and had no love for studying. I didn’t acquire this attitude from my family, since all of them are extremely hard workers, and they love to learn. For example, my sister is so dyslexic that doctors thought she wouldn’t be able to walk, let alone read. But through hard work and even harder studying, she is now top in her business class. My Dad is the only member of his large family to go to college, mainly because he was the only one in his house that studied hard enough to go. My mother came from a family that were servants to an extremely wealthy couple. By hard work and hard studying, she now has the highest degree for aquatic environmental entomologist out there. And then there was me, the one who didn’t want to work hard at anything. Studying was easy; I could get away without preparing for tests and still ace them. Work around the house wasn’t too hard, and I didn’t have a job because that would require a lot of effort. My walk with the Lord was faltering, but that didn’t matter as long as my life was going well, right? I saw no problems on the horizon.

I guess I didn’t look at the horizon carefully, because a huge problem soon appeared. As a child, money is never an issue that comes to mind. But as I entered my junior year of high school,

things began to change. It became evident that my parents were not as rich as I had once thought. It was not because they weren't hard workers, or that my father gambled all our money away. It was

because my parent's jobs did not pay well, and because they had given up many work hours to spend time with me and my siblings. They were already supporting my sister in college, so there was little chance I would get any help financially. And since I had little money of my own, it looked like I would not be going to college. "Have you started preparing for the ACT?" my mom asked out of the blue one day. "The what?" I replied. "It's a test that you need to take to get into colleges" she said. "But I'm not going to college" I said. "If you get a high enough score, you can get a full ride" she replied. "I don't know, that sounds like a lot of work" I said. "If you want to go to college, you have to get a scholarship." I decided I might as well give it a shot. Pencils up.

It was harder than I thought. Studying for a three-hour test was not first on my list of fun things to do. When my friends were done with school for the day, they would hangout, play video games, or go outside and kick the soccer ball around. When I was done with school for the day, I would sit at my desk and start working on the ACT. I thought it was a waste of my time. So did my friends. "Stop being such a try-hard and come play some soccer" my buddies would say. Every atom in my body wanted to put my pencil down, stand up, throw my ACT Prep books into the nearest trash can, and follow their advice. But I didn't. I kept working through my practice tests and exams, through all the math calculations and graphs, until I noticed something about me starting to change.

I started to realize how selfish I was for wasting my time and my talents that God had given me. God had given me a good brain, and all I used it for was to beat the next level of some video game. Over the next few months I started to gain a work ethic that I had never had before. I started to love studying. It was fun to learn new facts and ideas, and I looked forward to the challenges that the difficult subjects presented. I still enjoyed soccer and video games and all that stuff, but the joy of learning started to overshadow those things. I stopped caring that my friends thought I was a nerd for working hard.

This love of studying I was getting from the ACT preparation started to leak into other parts of my life. My school subjects, from English to Entomology, started to seem more interesting, and putting more time into doing my chores seemed like no big deal. The biggest improvement was not in academics though, but in my walk with the Lord. Devotions used to be something that took too much effort and time to seem worthwhile. But when I developed my love of studying, the Bible didn't appear as such a daunting task anymore. I began to really study the great book, and was surprised to learn how much I grew as a Christian because of it. Learning to study is one of the best things that ever happened to me.

But even with this newfound work effort, I still was not going to college. My friends kept telling that I shouldn't worry about the ACT and be happy with whatever score I got, but they didn't have worry because their parents were paying all their college tuition, and all they had to do was get an above the 50 percentile. I, on the other hand, needed a 31 on my ACT to get the scholarship I needed; 26,000 dollars a year, or 104,000 dollars in total. This meant that if I wanted a score of 31, I had to be better than 97 percent of the students that took the test. I had two chances to take it, and if I didn't get a 31 or above on either of those, I was not going to college.

"Name?" "Gregg Mendel." "You'll be in room 247." The receptionist at the ACT center walked me to my room. As we walked I passed room after room of teenagers just like me; sitting at desks waiting to start their test. Room 247 was at the very end of the hall way. When I got in there, I noticed it was far less packed than the other rooms. And then I noticed something else. There were no desks, only chairs. "Is this a waiting room?" I asked the receptionist. She merely grunted as she closed the door behind me. The next three hours were terrible. Through some horrible mix-up, the center had put me and a couple of other students in a room that wasn't meant for testing. I had to balance the text booklet on the right arm of my chair, hold my scantron with my left, and balance my calculator in my lap. Needless to say I did not get the 31 that was required. Pencils down.

A month passed, and my final chance to take the ACT had arrived. I arrived at Granville high school early in the morning to make sure I got a seat with an actual desk. As I sat in my chair, I started to get a little nervous. After this test, my life would go one

of two directions, towards college or towards some job like burger flipping. “I can’t believe we are required to take this stupid test to go to college” the girl next to me said. “Yea” everyone but me mumbled back. It felt like I was the only one in the room whose future depended on this test. Everybody else was only taking the ACT to get it out of the way as a requirement. The instructor walked in, looking board out of his brains, and told us we would have 60 minutes to answer 60 math questions, 45 minutes to answer 120 English related questions, 35 minutes for 40 science questions, and 35 minutes for 40 reading questions. “Last chance” I thought to myself. “Good luck” the instructor said. He started the timer. “Pencils up!”

A few weeks later as I was finishing my last semester of high school, I got a letter in the mail from the American College Testing program. I opened it slowly for fear of what might be inside. I saw my score; I had gotten a 31. Pencils down.