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Blank Pages, Colorful Thoughts

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Kimberly Powell

Kimberly Powell is a freshman marketing major from Ohio. She loves creative writing and often journals before she hits the pillow each night. A blonde from a family of five daughters, Kimmy enjoys whistling, playing volleyball, and meeting new people. Her enthusiasm and energy shines through her every laugh and smile. Kimmy loves the Lord with all her heart and sharing Christ's love by encouraging those around her.

Blank Pages, Colorful Thoughts

“But Mrs. Connolly, I’m stumped. I have no clue what to write,” I complained as my fellow classmates began to scribble away on yellow steno pads. She peered overtop her brown-rimmed glasses and smiled as she replied, “Then write just that. All I want you to do is to transfer the thoughts in your head onto the paper in front of you.” She clapped her hands together a couple times as she made her way back to a steaming cup of coffee waiting at her desk. Directing my attention back to the blue lines, I began to write. *Umm, well, I’m writing right now, and I had waffles for dinner last night.* Incoherent thought bled into the next incoherent thought, but nonetheless, I was writing. Meanwhile, the wall commonly known as “writer’s block” slowly began to crumble as my inner creative monster broke into my imagination.

Minutes later, Mrs. Connolly slipped on her heeled boots and made her way to the podium in the front of the classroom. Her short stature, even though she walked in 3-inch wedges, was unthreatening, comical even, and her voice was lively as she exclaimed, “Alright, pencils down. Who wants to read first?” Hands popped up all around the room, waving frantically in hopes being the first to tell his or her story, but my hands remained securely underneath my thighs as I slid further down in my seat. My best friend Mollie turned to me and said, “Oh, come on Kimmy! Why don’t ya wanna read?” Before I could respond, she raised her left hand as she nervously chewed on her right hand’s nails. Because of her unmatched enthusiasm, Mrs. Connolly called on Mollie, who cleared her throat before beginning in a high-pitch, yet cheerful tone. Her blue eyes widened with each added description, and as I sat amongst her classmates, laughing at Mollie’s inflection in the differing characters and well-timed jokes, I could not help being impressed by the random creativity she had stored in the crevices of her brain.

My eyes returned to my own writing, and the moments of creative revelation I had had minutes before seemed to dull in comparison to the originality Mollie presented in the matter of

seconds. Unlike my best friend, the box that withheld my creativity, my independent thinking had yet to be opened, but over the course of my middle school years, the tape slowly but surely was ripped off, revealing originality that shaped me into who I am today.

Every morning, promptly at 9:02 Mrs. Connolly would walk to the front of the classroom, grab a colored expo marker, and write a prompt on the whiteboard. I would stare at the options, quickly formulating mini stories around each one and choosing the one I thought most relatable. When pen met paper, I found it difficult to begin, to string my thoughts together in such a way as to entertain my classmates and express the creativity stored deep in my brain. Countless times, I would begin a sentence only to scratch it out upon losing a train of thought. Each sentence seemed boring and bland in comparison to Mollie's. Somehow, she was like a master chef when it came to writing: she enticed listeners with a drizzling of gerunds and dialogue, spiced up the plot with grueling actions and tasteful adjectives, and left them with a nail-biting cliffhanger. My stories, on the other hand, were the equivalent to toast: plain, white, flavorless toast.

In hopes of gaining the appetites of my listeners, I asked Mollie one day how she was such a good writer. "I dunno, Kim. I just kinda write what I'm thinking," she said as she tilted her head to the side, letting out an innocent little giggle. I picked up my pencil but remained motionless as I stared at the blank sheet before me. In the upper left corner I wrote the word *The*; hesitating, I began to erase that single word, but the lead merely smeared, so I tore the page from my notebook and scrunched it into a small ball. When I knew Mrs. Connolly had turned around, I shot the paper ball into the nearby wastebasket. Hearing the sound of the plastic trash bag, she whipped around in her chair and stared at me overtop those brown-rimmed glasses. Like a guilty puppy, I slinked back in my seat, monotonously tapping my number two pencil against my wooden desk. Despite my many attempts, I could find no perfect way to start my story, and instead of brainstorming ideas, I crossed out the words, obliterating any trace of my failed efforts.

Mrs. Connolly, wise with many years, sensed that I was struggling, and sat down with me after class. The joints in the student desk creaked as she eased into the plastic seating. My eyes remained locked on the scratched out words and phrases on the page in front of me. The ticking clock in the front of the classroom echoed as we sat in the silence. I took in a deep breath, inhaling the smells of old, used books and then exhaled. Without looking up from my journal, I muttered, "I am so boring. This journaling comes so easily for Mollie, but when I try to be funny or serious, it doesn't sound good." Quiet for a moment, Mrs. Connolly crossed her arms and placed her hand under her chin as if to emphasize the fact that she was thinking. "Kimmy," she

replied, resting her hand gently on my shoulder. “I think you just need to find your voice, not Mollie’s voice or anyone else’s but your very own unique voice.”

My own voice. Up until that point, my writing had merely been a regurgitation of facts, a replication of sentences I had seen in children’s books, a daily chore for learning parts of speech. But writing is so much more than that. Mrs. Connolly, interrupting the motion of the wheels turning in my head, said, “Kimmy, tell me a story. Any story.” I thought for a moment and instantly remembered a comical instance that had happened at recess the day before. As I recounted the story, a smile began to appear on Mrs. Connolly’s face. “There you go!” she exclaimed. “That is your voice. Now just write those words down on paper.”

Something clicked within me. It was as if my thoughts had gone from black and white to vibrant HD color, as if my imagination had come alive on paper. Writing, among many things, was a means of thinking aloud, a way for my God-given creativity to be expressed. I sat in the grey, plastic chair in the middle of the classroom, thinking about the hundreds of worlds my pencil had yet to explore. Closing my steno pad, I turned to Mrs. Connolly and grinned from ear to ear. “You’re the best, Mrs. C.” Her blue eyes sparkled with what I thought was a tear, and her warm smile appeared once again. “I’ll see ya tomorrow, kiddo,” she replied as she returned to her desk.

Each day in 6th grade English seemed better than the one before. My love for creative writing was poured into journals both at school in my locker and at home on my nightstand. I had found my voice and with each passing day, that voice grew louder and stronger. When Mrs. Connolly would ask for volunteers to read, my hand was one of the first to shoot up. As I read my stories, the class seemed to melt over the fire that my creativity had set. Within a matter of sentences, I had gripped the attention of the audience, taking them with me on my journeys as a CIA agent and as an orphaned monkey. Even Mollie, whom I had hailed a child prodigy in the area of creative writing, once whispered to me after I read my story, “Kimmy, that story was hilarious!” A goofy grin crossed her face as she winked in my direction. I giggled back, “Thanks,” as we high-fived and sat back in our chairs. Mrs. Connolly, who surely had the hearing of a bat, seemed to have heard the interaction that Mollie and I just shared because instead of reprimanding our giggling, she simply flashed the same warm smile and continued on with her lesson. From then on, a permanent warm smile was etched on my face. I absolutely loved writing, and more than anything, I wanted to share that love with more than just those in my class.

Going into high school, my sphere of influence drastically changed from nine kids and a handful of teachers at a Christian school to well over a thousand kids at the local high school.

Much of my freshman year I shied away from the creativity scene, keeping many of my stories and ideas to myself. Hankering for a creative outlet, I decided to make a scrapbook for my sister that summer through a program in 4H. I soon found that unlike writing, scrapbooking told a story through pictures and artsy stickers and embellishments, giving me the artistic license to be innovative, to think outside the limitation of words, and to take crafting to a whole new level. But much like the writing process, it was not easy to scrapbook. Countless nights I stared at yet another blank paper, only this time, a colored pattern decorated the page. The pictures and stickers served as the words of my story, and after arranging and rearranging them at different angles, my glue gun, acting as my pencil, would commit my words to paper.

When the day came for judging, the gray-haired woman fingered through the glossy pages, analyzing the fine-tuned details and the colorful decorations. She paused only to push her glasses back up the bridge of her nose as she continued to flip through the pages. After waiting patiently for a response, I asked her, “Well? What do you think?”

She smiled, the same reassuring smile I had seen countless times before on Mrs. Connolly’s face after she had listened to one of my stories. “This is a story,” the woman began, “that I think the judges at the Ohio State Fair would like to see.” Dumbfounded, I stammered over my words, forcing out a quick thank you before running to tell my mother the good news.

For three years, judges at the Ohio State Fair viewed my artwork. They took the time, whether they liked it or not, to listen to my voice, a voice which for so long struggled to be heard. A voice, which found it difficult to sing in the quiet moments. A voice which, given time, would reveal a creativity that would otherwise have remained silent, dormant in my mind. A voice, which was finally heard because of woman’s ability to inspire.