

Defining Moments

by Beverly Denver

When I was in fifth grade, my teacher, Miss Dyson, gave our class a weekend assignment that I'll never forget. She said, "Write a two-page essay about what you want to do when you grow up — and why."

I spent a good deal of the weekend trying to figure out exactly what she meant by "do." You see, at that point in time, I thought little girls just grew up "to be." To be wives, to be mothers!

Sure, some of my girlfriends back then talked about becoming teachers. Mostly, those whose mothers were teachers.

Well, my mother wasn't a teacher, and my dad always talked about how undervalued teachers were. Even at the age of 10, I knew I didn't want to grow up to be undervalued. So, for me, saying I wanted to be a teacher wasn't a believable option.

Girls who didn't faint at the sight of blood could write about becoming nurses, but that wouldn't work for me. Back then, I would faint just thinking about blood. At Kerr Elementary, the weakness of my knees was legendary.

So, instead of making progress on the assignment, I spent most of that rainy weekend distracted. I talked on the telephone with friends, played the piano, slept and read for pleasure. As bedtime approached, and I had still not put words to paper, panic set in. Trying to help, my mother suggested I turn to my books for inspiration.

In the end, a particular one — my all-time favorite — saved the day.

The hero, his adoring love interest and the adventurous lives they lived enthralled me.

I couldn't help but think: "I've got it! I'll grow up and "do" what Lois does. Snoop around in big cities, write about interesting people and hang out with good-looking men! What could be better?"

The (comic) book was, of course, *The Adventures of Superman*.

Writing that essay turned out to be a defining moment in my life.

Surprisingly, the words came easy. They were weightless, of course, falling like feathers on the page, and innocently naive. But, they were also passionately enthusiastic, as if pinned by a secret admirer suffering from delusions.

The next day I turned in the essay; I got an A for my efforts. Next to the grade, Miss Dyson wrote these words, "Well-written. You may have found your calling!"

Since then, there have been many more defining moments in my life, and glory is to God, most often I've recognized them as such. Like stepping-stones on a winding path, they've led me in only one direction: towards the telling of other people's stories!

Over the years, the vehicle of exchange and the audience have changed often. I no longer hang out with good-looking men all day, but being around so many inspiring women isn't all that bad!

The initial bite of that news bug still dominates my life; its venom still flows vigorously through my veins.

I consider myself lucky! So many people don't enjoy what they do, and that's sad. It can make the difficulties and disappointments of the day-to-day painful and without purpose.

I often wonder, "Do those people not also experience defining moments in their lives? Do they not interrupt them as Divine messages from above? Do they not see them as hints of what their contribution to this community could be?"

Defining moments happen for a reason! Perhaps their role is to help us find ourselves? And, perhaps the parts of us that are uniquely special, the parts we were meant to share with others?

It comforts me to believe that!

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