

Blossoms of Resilience

My Journey through Books and Fields

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WR 121

My literary character manifested under the sheltered shade of a blueberry bush in a field where lanes of fruit stretch for miles beyond the naked eye. Every morning since the age of nine, as the sun met the horizon, I followed hundreds of eager workers as we lined up, holding buckets, in front of large semi trucks. We burned, bruised, and bled for a measly \$0.30 per pound of labor. As bad as pay was, treatment was far worse. Still, employees couldn't just leave the job; they had no option but to succumb to unfair treatment. I saw my own mother and father be belittled by racist bosses on a daily basis. On various occasions our checks only came out to a fraction of what they should've been, leaving us to withdraw from our meager savings to pay bills. I was burning to get out and lead a different life for myself and my family.

To cope with my reality, I found solace in books. Every day I packed a book inside my lunch bag so I could get my thirty minutes of AR reading. I valued honesty and education. I felt that putting my efforts into school would be the way to get my hands out of the dirt. Books allowed me to travel the world, experience having money, and live in different cultures. Meanwhile, in my own story, I felt I was still going through the exposition where the character struggles before living a great life and everything goes their way. I was forced to work four hours before class or to skip school to make ends meet. Yet, I had great hope that life would only get better from here. In the meantime, through reading, I captured a small glimpse of worlds that could only be imagined in my dreams.

Still, life had its own plans, and I guess maybe life wasn't hard enough on me yet. As I progressed in my studies, the weight of school responsibilities began to press down on me. Anxiety crept in to my days like an unwelcome shadow. I hid my report card from my parents, not because I was failing but because I couldn't stand it when they always made it a point to mention any grade of B or A-. However nothing I ever did—no amount of recognition or awards—were ever enough for them. Being top of the class

and being on honor roll was an expectation of theirs; anything less was shameful. The mere thought of failing sent me into a spiral.

Yet a dim light shined on my life when I had been given a scholarship to attend a private school. My efforts began to pay off. I felt excited, ready to show off my skills, wear uniforms, and mostly see what the private school kids were all about. Though as I entered through those metal double doors on the first day of class, I felt a sting of social disparity. Students as young as four years old wore designer shoes. Students participated in expensive hobbies such as equestrian riding, ice skating, ballet, and fencing. And at the end of the day, they'd be picked up in brand new Mercedes, Cadillacs, and other luxury vehicles. Once students realized I was there on a scholarship and had low income parents, they began to bully me. Students made rude comments, left mean notes in my locker, and left me out of social events. Matters only got worse once my mom got a job cleaning the school and student homes. I was ashamed to say hello to her as I passed her down the hallway or sit next to her during school family events. During this time I lashed out and slowly stopped indulging in literature as I had done so passionately before. Now it hurts me to think that I could've ever been ashamed and ignored my mom, the most

hardworking, strong, and resilient woman I've ever come across. I understand now that everything she ever did was for the best of me and for that I cherish and love her. She's truly a huge inspiration and a huge reason I keep going.

Finally, after leaving that school, my anxiety lessened, and I emerged stronger than ever. My love for reading, a love that had once been paused, found its way back into my life like a beacon of inspiration guiding me toward a future where my dreams could indeed become reality. I recall reading Erika L. Sanchez' memoir *Crying in the Bathroom*, where she stated "success for migrant workers meant working inside with an air conditioner." To anyone else that is a sentence that they forgot about minutes after they read it, but I connected to it so deeply that I began to sob. A light of hope burst inside me as I regained sight of my dreams. I wasn't just doing this for an A, but I was doing it for my community, my family and, just as importantly, for myself. I always hoped to serve as a beacon of hope for younger girls currently working in the fields that it is possible to realize your dreams from the dirt up. The blueberry fields were my workplace, but the stories within those pages I found were my escape.

They reminded me that no matter the challenges, the magic of words will always light the way.