

Social and Emotional Development of Talented Students

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Some of Us March to Different Music

Erma Bombeck

Every family's got at least one. The child who will not conform...the rebel...the loner...the renegade...the one who is different.

As a preschooler, he's the one with the active thyroid...the one who gets locked in restrooms because he stayed behind to find out where the water went when you pushed down the handle. He's the one who wanders away from home and gets his arm stuck in a piece of construction pipe. He's the one who rejects store-bought toys in favor of taking the registers out and making tunnels out of old oatmeal boxes. He gets more lickings than all the other kids put together.

In school, he gets checkmarks for daydreaming, for not being neat, for not working up to capacity. It doesn't seem to bother him. In his preoccupation with other things, he is unaware that he drives his family crazy arriving late for dinner every night...wearing his socks and underwear to bed to save time in the morning...cutting the grass only when he needs the money.

The older he gets, the less aware he becomes of his odds with the world. There aren't enough weekends for his interests and his projects. In the garage is his "pumping heart" which he devised out of plastic sandwich bags, tubing and cake coloring. Cluttering the bedroom is the remains of the puppet show with the blanket (curtain) tucked in the top bunk bed. On the table is his latest book (it takes an entire afternoon to write them) "Floyd: The Story of an Insecure Snake with Bad Breath."

Parents are awed by genius. They are content with an average child. They are compassionate toward the slow learner. But the child who stands apart is none of these only puzzles, confuses, and tries their patience.

They confess to each other their fears for his future, this child who is unpredictable and not only out-of step with the world, but whose feet rarely touch the ground, "What's to become of him?"

Some of them, with their insatiable curiosity and hardheaded drive, will beat paths of greatness and discovery, the likes of Winston Churchill and Michelangelo. Others won't be great at all, but with their enthusiasm, imagination, creativity and penchant for living life to its fullest, who is to say they are not the first to touch the stars?

So he is accident-prone because he daydreams...he gets hit by animals because he's foolishly trusting...maintains a closet that the insurance company refuses to insure. Look at him closely. He is something special to remind us all that life is a precious gift to be lived to its fullest.

And as David Thoreau said, "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears."

Dabrowski's Theory of Emotional Development

- Level I – Self Interest
- Level II – Group Values
- Level III – Transformational Growth
- Level IV – Self-Actualization
- Level V – Personality Ideal

Examples of Heightened Sensitivities (Piechowski, 2006)

Psychomotor

- Organic excess of energy
- Love of movement for its own sake
- Rapid speech
- Pursuit of intense physical activity
- Impulsiveness and restlessness
- Intense drive

Sensual

- Heightened experience of sensual pleasure
- Seeking sensual outlets for inner tension
- Desires for comfort, luxury, and refined beauty
- Pleasures of taste and smell

Imaginational

- Dreams are retold in detail and vivid color
- Predilection for fairy tales and magic
- Love of poetic language, rich imagery, fantasy
- Speaking and writing in metaphors
- Imaginary companions
- Inventiveness

Intellectual

- Persistence in asking probing questions
- Sharp sense of observation
- Independence of thought
- Striving for synthesis of knowledge
- Striving for more understanding and truth than with academic learning and achievement

Emotional

- Compassion and empathy
- Strong affective recall of past experiences
- Intense desire to offer love
- Fears, anxieties, depression
- Enthusiasm and excitement
- Intense loneliness
- Attachments to persons, living things, or places
- Great intensity of feelings

Social and Emotional Characteristics and Traits of Talented Students

High Expectations of Self and Others – Perfectionism

Internal Motivation or Inner Locus of Control

Emotional Sensitivity, Intensity, and Depth

Empathy

Advanced Levels of Moral Maturity with Consistency
Between Values and Actions

Strong Need for Self-Actualization

Highly Developed Sense of Humor

Resilience

Hébert (2011)

Creating Supportive Classroom Environments for Talented Kids

Strategies Facilitated During Our Time Together This Week

Little Known Facts

Opening Day of School: Daniel Henderson and Linda McNair

Business Cards

Wanted Posters

Avatars

Word Clouds

Marjorie Frank's Poetry Techniques

Interest Inventories

Photo Elicitation

Social Action Campaigns

Dialogue Journals

Classroom Mailbox

Guiding Students Using Literature

Biography 101

Guided Viewing of Film

Mentoring – Big Brother, Big Sister Partnerships

Heavy Bags

Stress Busters

Strategies to Address Perfectionism

Our Civil Rights

I have a right to learn about myself in this room;
this means I will be free to express my feelings without being
interrupted or punished.

I have a right to hear and be heard in this room;
this means no one will yell, scream, shout or make loud noises.

I have a right to be myself in this room; this means that no one will
treat me unfairly because I am black or white, fat or thin, tall or short,
boy or girl.

I have a right to be safe in this room; this means no one will hit me,
kick me, push me, punch me or hurt me.
I can also express my feelings without fear that those ideas, opinions,
and feelings will be repeated outside the room.

I have a right to be happy and to be treated with kindness in this room;
this means no one will laugh at me or hurt my feelings.

The Case of Justin Kerry¹

Justin Kerry stepped off the city bus and began walking slowly down one of the busiest streets in Portland, Maine. As he maneuvered his way along the crowded sidewalk, he appeared to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. The red-headed, freckled-faced fifth-grader stopped to browse through every magazine stand along Congress Street, surveyed the latest comic books, and checked out the most recent edition of *Sports Illustrated*. Justin realized he was just killing time. He really didn't care that he would be late for soccer practice, and he knew that the conversation he would soon be having with Coach Fitzgerald was not going to be smooth. He could envision his coach's face turning crimson, and he could hear the dreaded holler; however, Justin was determined to stick with his plan. As he approached Patriot Park, he checked his duffel bag once more. Inside the bag was the soccer uniform he planned to turn in to his coach. He checked to be sure he hadn't forgotten anything. Arriving at the field, he heard Coach Fitzgerald's gruff voice call out, "Well, it's about time you got here, Kerry! You're late. That's gonna be an extra 15 laps around the park for you today. You know the rules, Kerry. When am I ever gonna get that through your thick head? Huh? Tell me, big guy!"

"Hey, Coach, I need to talk with you about something."

"I haven't got time to listen to your problems today, Kerry. I've got a team to run. Some of these guys really want to play soccer, remember? So get out on that field, and let me see you work on your volley kick! Hurry! Get out there!"

Justin took a deep breath, and with all the courage he could summon, he blurted, "Coach, you don't understand. I'm quitting the team. I'm here today to turn in my uniform. I don't want to play any more."

"What do you mean? You don't want to play? What are you? Some kind of woos? You're my star forward. What do you expect me to do without a forward? You know Carmichael can't fill your shoes. Now get out there and practice!"

¹ Hébert (2011) *Understanding the Social and Emotional Lives of Gifted Students*

As Justin reached into his duffel bag and pulled out his uniform, the expression on the coach's face changed. He realized that his star player meant what he said. He really was there to quit the team.

Justin walked over to the back of the coach's SUV and left his uniform on the back seat. Coach stood there shaking his head. As Justin attempted to say goodbye, Coach Fitzgerald cut him off, muttering, "You're gonna regret this one day, Kerry. Trust me, you're gonna be sorry."

Justin Kerry was not feeling sorry. He knew he did not want to continue playing soccer. He had lost interest in the team. He didn't care if the coach and all the guys on the team thought he was a woos. He had practiced his speech over and over in his head for weeks. Although he figured he would feel relieved when it was over, Justin didn't feel that way at all. Instead, he felt another wave of dread. He now had to figure out what he was going to say to his parents when Coach Fitzgerald called his father. He could hear his dad carry on about his never sticking to a commitment. He still had a couple of hours before his family expected him home for dinner, so he planned to walk home in a roundabout way. He passed Longfellow Square and decided to spend some time in his favorite museum. Miss Winstead, his art teacher, had mentioned on Tuesday that the museum was featuring a special exhibit on cartooning. She seemed really excited about the work that was being displayed, and she encouraged the students to ask their parents to take them to see the new show. Justin decided the museum would be a great way to kill some more time before he had to face the "I'm so disappointed in you" speech from his dad.

It was a quiet Friday afternoon, the perfect ending to a hectic week at Mahoney Elementary School. Carolyn Clark was seated at her desk grading her fifth-graders' papers when Beth Winstead came rushing into her classroom holding a small canvas. The art teacher was obviously excited as she waved Justin Kerry's work and placed it on the desk before her.

"Carolyn, will you look at this? This kid is amazing! Justin constantly astounds me with his talent. I've been teaching art for twelve years, and I've never met a student with such a natural gift. I introduced our fifth-graders to Salvador Dali this month, and for the past three weeks Justin has been working on surrealism. Look at the imagery in this painting. It's incredible."

As Carolyn admired the painting, she, too, was impressed with Justin's artistic ability. She smiled as Beth carried on about Justin's artistic talent and his ability to "see the world through the eyes of an artist." Beth explained that she was struggling with a dilemma. She wanted to recommend Justin for the school district's magnet program in the fine arts for next year, but this would mean that Justin would no longer be involved in her art program. Having talented youngsters like Justin Kerry kept Beth Winstead professionally invigorated: "It's kids like Justin Kerry who keep me believing that I can make a difference."

Beth decided to share Justin's painting with the staff in the front office and therefore grabbed the painting from the desk and dashed out of the room, leaving Carolyn Clark with her thoughts. Carolyn was pleased to see Justin's painting; however, she had mixed feelings that afternoon. She had been worried about Justin for a while. She wondered why Justin would immerse himself in surrealism so intensely. She reflected on the article she had read recently about troubled adolescent boys hiding from their personal problems through their artwork, and she remembered how the author had indicated that Dali's surrealism was often seen as an escape for many youngsters. This seemed to be consistent with what she had noticed lately about Justin.

As she reviewed her grade roster, Carolyn thought about Justin's recent lack of progress in her fifth-grade class. She also thought about the conversation she had earlier in the week with the school's enrichment teacher, Susan Curtis, who had shared her concerns about Justin's lack of motivation in the gifted program. Susan had been working with Justin since he was identified for the program in first grade, with an IQ score of 140, creativity test scores in the ninety-eighth percentiles, and strong teacher recommendations. She pointed out that this was the first year Justin had not chosen to pursue an independent study project during research time in the resource room. In the past, Justin had been enthusiastic about his individual research projects on endangered animals, the Vietnam War, and the cartoon art of Charles Schultz, and he had always been a competitor on the elementary school's Quiz Bowl team. This year was different, and Susan Curtis was puzzled. She mentioned to Carolyn that she had decided that Justin was simply experiencing nothing more than a late "fourth-grade slump."

Carolyn Clark was not convinced that Justin's behavior was merely a slump. She thought back to her lunchroom duty several days ago when she had watched Justin eating his lunch in a corner of the school cafeteria. In the mob of boisterous students, he had appeared more detached than ever. As Carolyn supervised the lunchroom, she had noticed Justin closely watching a group of guys clowning around at the next table. These students enjoying rowdy conversation had a reputation at Mahoney for their disruptive behavior. Teachers in the faculty room had commented on the likelihood that these boys would someday become a high school gang. Carolyn worried that Justin was becoming intrigued with the behavior of the disreputable students. Now as Carolyn studied her class grade roster, she felt guilty. She had intended to call Justin's parents to talk about his plummeting grades and the recent change in his behavior, but she dreaded making that phone call and had been putting it off for several weeks.

Margaret and Mike Kerry had been Carolyn's good friends during their years together at Bowdoin College. Margaret and Carolyn had both majored in English. Carolyn knew that Margaret was teaching in a parochial school in the city, and Mike had been employed in the city planner's office. Carolyn thought back to their college days during the late sixties and smiled to herself. She reflected on her own idealism at that time and the passion she, Margaret, and Mike had had for a number of causes. Margaret and Mike had been significant personalities at Bowdoin College, taking on a heavy load of extracurricular activities and providing leadership on a number of important campaigns involving students' rights. Now these two well established professionals continued their involvement in important causes and were well known as social activists. Carolyn had taught their daughter Maureen a number of years ago and had marveled at how wonderful a student she was. Having excelled academically, socially, and athletically, Maureen had a magical way of turning everything she touched into gold. In fact, Carolyn had just read in the *Portland Press Herald* that Maureen had been awarded a Jeffersonian Fellowship and would be studying at the University of Virginia in the fall. As she read the article she wondered how Justin had coped with having such a tough act to follow.

Although she dreaded making that phone call to her old friends, she knew she had to do it. As she reviewed Justin's grades, she noted that his language arts average had dropped from an A to a C.

He had not turned in any social studies homework for two weeks and had failed his most recent test. His grades in science were also dropping. She thought back to a conversation with Mr. McGowan, Justin's math teacher, who had referred to Justin as a "kid with an attitude." Apparently, his progress in math might also be a problem. She wondered if any of Justin's other teachers had contacted his parents. She decided to include Susan Curtis, Justin's enrichment teacher in her plan. She would call the Kerrys and arrange a parent-teacher conference. Having Susan at the meeting might help Carolyn deliver the troublesome message.

Carolyn poured coffee for Margaret and Mike as they waited for Susan Curtis to arrive in Carolyn's classroom. Margaret initiated the conversation with her concern for her son.

"I'm so grateful to you for calling us, Carolyn. We've been noticing a number of changes in Justin at home lately and wondered if the same was true in school. Mike has been upset with him for quitting the soccer team."

Mike interrupted, "He seems to have so few interests these days. All he does after school is lie on his bed and listen to his iPod all afternoon. We can't get him outside. This is the same kid who was the star forward on his team. The kid is a natural athlete, and now we don't hear anything about sports or the guys he used to hang out with. We don't know who his friends are these days. We ask him about it, but he just shrugs his shoulders. We don't know what to think."

Margaret became teary-eyed as she spoke, "He's so different from his sister Maureen. We've always been able to communicate openly with our daughter. She's always been so easygoing. I guess boys are different. He seems so moody all the time."

Susan Curtis arrived in the classroom and apologized for being late. The Kerrys were happy to see her again. They knew her quite well because she had been working with Justin since first grade, and they felt assured that she had his best interests at heart. Susan shared with Margaret and Mike that Justin had not begun an independent study project, and she was wondering if they might have an

explanation. Both parents assured Susan that the enrichment program she facilitated had been the highlight of Justin's elementary school experiences for years. They were puzzled, but Mike said, "That's consistent with what we're seeing. He doesn't have any interests these days and he's simply not making a commitment to anything."

Margaret became more emotional as she described what Justin had been like as a younger child. "Justin has always been such a sensitive child. I'll always remember the night we stayed up until wee hours of the morning trying to comfort him after he watched the movie *E.T.* He was such an emotional mess after that movie. We thought he'd never fall asleep."

Mike interjected, "Yes, this little guy wouldn't be able to fall asleep because he was worrying about bald eagles becoming extinct! After a while we hesitated about allowing him to watch *National Geographic* specials on television. We never knew what might happen as a result."

With more emotion in Margaret's voice, she commented, "And when his first-grade teacher had the class involved in a project raising money for a soup kitchen, we dealt with night after night of assurances that his efforts would definitely make a difference for the homeless people in Portland. He was convinced we could deliver pillows and blankets to all of them throughout the city! Even though he has this deep sensitivity and intelligence, he simply doesn't seem to care about anything these days. I just don't understand."

Carolyn hesitated before she said, "I need to let you know where Justin stands academically in a number of his subjects. First of all, I want you to know that Beth Winstead, the art teacher, thinks the world of Justin. She was in here a few days ago so excited about a painting Justin had finished in her art room. She thinks he's one of the most gifted artists she's ever seen. I did check with Rick McGowan and I know there are problems in math. Rick couldn't be here this afternoon, but he left Justin's math test grades with me. Rick claims that Justin hasn't turned in any math homework lately, and he failed his most recent test."

Carolyn could tell this news was not what Margaret and Mike Kerry wanted to hear, but she continued, "I'm not seeing any social studies homework from Justin, and his grades in language arts and

science are also spiraling downward. Right now he has a C average in language arts and a D in social studies and science.”

“This is totally out of control!” Mike Kerry blurted. “Wait until I get home. This kid is in deep trouble!”

Carolyn remained calm as she spoke, “Now Mike, keep in mind, lots of kids go through stages like this. Justin may be trying to tell us something. We have to listen closely. Yesterday in language arts class I asked the students to work on writing simple cinquain poems, and I was surprised with the response I got from Justin. I found his poem rather troubling. Here. I want the two of you to take a look at this.”

Carolyn placed the poem on the table before them. She read:

Fifth grade

A place to vegetate

Boring, frustrating, wasting

Free my spirit – send me away

Failure

When they were finished reading the poem, Susan Curtis spoke softly, “I’ve changed my mind. What I saw as a slump is more serious than I thought. Poor little guy, I’ve known Justin for years, and I hate to see this happening to him. Margaret, Mike, do you think we should have Justin talk with our school counselor? John DiBiaggio is a great guy. He’s got a great way of working with our kids. The students here really gravitate to him. He’s like a big burly teddy bear, but we’ve seen him make a difference for a lot of kids. Maybe Justin would let us know what’s troubling him through a little work with John. What do you think?”

Margaret Kerry sighed and leaned back in her chair. Her worried look registered her concern for her son. Mike placed his arm around his wife's shoulders, looked down at the table and spoke softly, "Yes, I do think that we'd better get Justin working with this guy John as soon as we can."

John DiBiaggio had been a school counselor at Mahoney Elementary for ten years. He really enjoyed his work, but he often admitted that he rarely saw a gifted student in his office, and that frustrated him. He shared with the teachers that one of his greatest joys was counseling gifted children. He was interested in how they viewed the world differently, marveled at their creative ways of expressing themselves, and admired their sensitive and empathic qualities. John was looking forward to meeting Justin Kerry. He'd done his homework in preparing for his first session, and had talked with Justin's parents and teachers.

When Justin arrived, John noticed that Justin seemed quite nervous. After chatting casually for a few minutes, he turned to a collection of board games in his office and suggested a game of chess. Justin shrugged his shoulders, smiled softly, and agreed to a game. As Justin eyed the chessboard closely and began to plan his strategy, John slowly began his questions for his young client.

"So tell me, how are things going in fifth grade these days?"

Again, Justin shrugged his shoulders and mumbled, "OK, I guess."

"Tell me, what's your favorite subject this year?"

"Art."

"Art class, huh? Tell me about it."

"Miss Winstead's class is cool. I really like her. She let's us work on awesome stuff."

As John DiBiaggio continued the conversation with Justin, he realized the report the Mahoney teachers had presented to him concerning Justin seemed consistent with what he was seeing in his office.

John thought to himself, "This gifted little guy has lots of layers I'll have to unravel before I get to the heart of his issues. I wonder how I'll get through."

"So tell me about math class these days."

With that prompt, Justin appeared even more reluctant and said nothing.

John spoke again, "I would think a really sharp guy like you would really enjoy math."

As Justin carried out his next move on the chessboard, he began to divulge his thoughts, "I have a problem with my teacher."

When John encouraged him to continue, Justin described his feelings about Rick McGowan: "I don't like him as a person. I just don't respect him at all."

John questioned him further, asking, "Can you tell me more about that?"

Justin appeared uncomfortable, but nevertheless continued, "He's one of those teachers that picks on kids. Kids like Montoya Marshall. Just because he's different, I guess. Montoya is a little crazy. He's cool. All the kids in fifth grade know that, but Mr. McGowan treats him like an outcast."

John noted the emotion that came across Justin's face as he spoke. He probed further by asking, "An outcast? Tell me about that."

"I think he had to go to the principal's office three times this week. He's always in trouble. Mr. McGowan kicks him out of class every day. He doesn't do anything to try to help Montoya. He just yells at him and says things like, 'If you're gonna' just sit there and be stupid, then sit there and be stupid!' He says those things in front of the whole class."

John commented, "It seems like Mr. McGowan's behavior really bothers you."

Justin responded, "Yeah, it does. He just doesn't treat kids with respect."

As he continued to discuss the insensitivity of the math teacher, Justin explained that if he didn't respect the teacher, there was no way he could motivate himself to work for the man. He finished his comments with an emphatic "I think he's a real jerk."

John DiBiaggio realized he had made an early breakthrough. He continued, "So, tell me. What's homework like in math these days?"

Justin made a strategic move on the chessboard, placing John's king in check once again. As he enjoyed the exasperated look on Mr. DiBiaggio's face, he smiled and proceeded to explain, "No, it's not tough at all. Math is my best subject."

John continued, "How about math homework?"

Justin smiled slightly and explained, "I have a personal philosophy on homework. If you know how to do it, why bother to do the homework? It's when you don't know how to do the work that you should have to sit down and figure it out, right?"

John smiled in return and didn't reply. He looked at Justin to continue.

"If I've proven in class that I know the stuff, why do I have to continue to prove that I know it by doing twenty more problems at home? I just don't see the logic in that."

John DiBiaggio stifled a laugh as Justin continued to grumble about the unfairness of fifth grade. He knew he was going to really enjoy getting to know Justin even better. He decided that Justin Kerry was a sharp customer, and he would expect some more very interesting conversations with him if the two of them could continue toward resolving Justin's situation. John knew he was in for an interesting ride with Justin, but he was looking forward to the journey.

Tomboy

I remember the first and only time I wrote to the president of the United States. I was in the fifth grade at the time and I sent a letter to Ronald Reagan. I have no idea what I said to him (he probably didn't either); it was just one of those assignments popular with fifth grade teachers. I didn't even know what a political party was or what the parties stood for (I now wonder if the politicians know). I was not one of those kids who stood up and said that someday I was going to be the president of the United States. Nevertheless, even at that age, I believed I could become whatever I wanted to become.

I had, what seemed to me, good reason to believe this. One Christmas when I was little I asked for a tool belt. I don't know what my fascination was with being a carpenter, but I was obsessed with that one gift. I got it. My parents didn't seem to have an opinion about what toys were or were not appropriate. My sister Rachel and I even received football uniforms for Christmas one year, because I was convinced that one day I would be good enough to play for the New England Patriots or the New York Giants. Santa obviously supported the idea. Or, I wanted to play basketball for the Boston Celtics. When I was in the third grade, I wrote the following letter to their general manager:

Dear Mr. Auerbach,

I really like watching the Celtics play. You do a really good job. I want you to know that I am going to be the first girl to play for the Boston Celtics.

Rebecca Lobo

Obviously, I was keeping all options open. It was the early eighties, and Larry Bird and company had just won one of their world championships. I was about eight or nine years old and really meant what I had written. I didn't think of myself as a trailblazer; I was at an age when I knew no gender. I was at an age when I thought I could do anything I wanted, and what I wanted was to play sports. I was also at an age when the physical differences between boys and girls were not very significant. In the summer I was perfectly comfortable without a shirt on shooting baskets in our driveway with my brother. Our chests looked pretty much the same. (Thank God that is no longer the case, and God, my brother thanks you, too.) Certainly taller, and probably stronger, than any of the boys in my class, I did not have any reason to think these circumstances would change. I also still believed in Santa Claus.

Now I'm a few years older and wiser. I've realized that I simply cannot play on a men's professional basketball team, but it wasn't easy to convince me of this. I first saw the physical differences between the men's and women's games "up close and personal" the spring of my sophomore year in college. I was sitting in Gampel Pavilion after a shooting workout and our men's team was about to play pickup. They had only nine people and asked me if I'd like to join them. I ran to get my ankles taped and returned ready for action. The first time I got the ball on offense I was about four feet from the basket and took a hook shot that basically would have been unblockable in the women's game. A second after it left my hand I saw it fly in the opposite direction as Rudy Johnson leaped in the air and rejected it. After we ran down court and got ready to play defense, I got into position in the lane. Then I saw Donny Marshall drive past me with the basketball. I was not about to get in the way of this 225-pound guy.

My next time down the court my nose was broken. As one of my teammates went up for a layup, I got on the other side of the hoop, in position to get the rebound in case he missed, I never expected him to hang in the air long enough to come over to my side of the basket before shooting. Upon landing, his shoulder went straight into my nose. It started bleeding immediately and I ran to the training room. I didn't start crying until I looked in to the mirror and saw a nose shaped like the letter S on my face. (It was the first of many broken noses for me.) I begged the school doctor to make my nose straight again. He understood my concern; he didn't want me to spend the rest of my life tilting my head in the same direction I wanted to kiss. He thought that a young woman needed to keep her options open.

In the third grade I thought I could compete with the men on that level. Now I realize that I can't, although one men's pro basketball team drafted me at the end of my senior year at UConn. It was flattering, but I knew it was a publicity stunt.

Growing up, I was definitely a tomboy. I liked playing sports and doing anything active. That same year I wrote to President Reagan, I was the only girl who sat with the boys at lunch. Our classroom was assigned two long tables in the cafeteria, and I always chose to sit with the boys. After all, they were the ones I played games with at recess and sat with during classes. At that time, there were soccer and football for boys, but nothing for girls to do, so along with a few boys, I organized races and kickball. The girls were more into hanging around the jungle gym and talking. I never imagined there was anything peculiar about being friends with the guys; I never even gave it a second thought. But one day my teacher called me to her desk. I thought she was going to give me my grades just like she did with everyone else in the class. She gave me more than that.

It was clear from the start of the year, I think, that she didn't like me. Earlier that year, in front of the whole class she had accused me of cheating on a test. I had gone home and complained to my mother. Since it was the beginning of the year, she didn't want me to get off to a bad start. So she called and left a message for the teacher at the school. The next day, this teacher called out my name and, again in front of the whole class, asked me why my mother had called. I told her I didn't know why. She then hauled me out into the hall and asked me again. I said that I guessed it was because she had accused me of cheating when I hadn't. Then she said that if I were going to go home and tell my mother everything that happened in her class, it was going to be a long year.

The day she called me to the front of the class, she said things to me that she didn't say to the others. After giving me my report card (I got very good grades), she proceeded to tell me that I was too much of a tomboy. She said that I should dress and act more like a girl. She asked me why I was the only one who sat with the boys at lunch. She addressed my appearance and the way I behaved. She said I had to change. I put my head down and didn't answer or look at her.

I wasn't getting into trouble (at least not too much) or slacking in school. I wasn't breaking any rules I knew about. But for a reason that totally angered and confused me at the time, my teacher was "concerned."

I went home and told my mother what this teacher had said to me. I'll never forget her response because it was even more shocking than my teacher's comments. As I had stood in front of the teacher listening to her, I knew my mother well enough to know that I could count on her to back me up. I knew she would tell me it was perfectly fine to dress like a boy, but I never expected the intensity of her response. Mom became furious. She found my father and repeated the story to him. She kept saying how she could not *believe* the *nerve* of my teacher. My mother was so angry that I wished I hadn't told her. I was afraid she would say something to my teacher and, remembering the teacher's threat, that I would get into even more trouble. Kids are totally powerless in those kinds of situations. Adults sometimes forget this but I don't think I ever will.

If I were to get a letter now from a young girl describing a similar kind of prejudice, I would go to her school and tell that girl's teacher that she (or he) was wrong. It is impossible to expect a young boy or girl to stand up for him- or herself, particularly in front of classmates. It is equally impossible to expect that you can legislate a change in others' attitudes. The only thing that can make a difference is the support of parents, school principals, and community leaders. Nobody else can protect a kid's sense of self.

Back then, I had yet to give much thought about what it meant to be a girl as opposed to a boy. (In fact, it wasn't until I got to high school that the whole issue of femininity came up. And even then, questions about it seemed centered on what kind of hairstyle I chose or what kind of makeup I might wear.) My mother raised her children to believe they could be anything they wanted. Now she had to deal with a teacher who was sending a very different message. Good thing my mom's message sounded louder and clearer in my head than this teacher's. If I had listened to the wrong woman, I would probably have thought there was something wrong or unfeminine about playing basketball. I would have thought there was something wrong with having friends who were boys. Luckily, my mom taught me well. I knew that there was nothing wrong with who I was.

I didn't change much after that lecture from my teacher. At the same time, I made sure I was no longer the only girl sitting with the boys at lunch, as I had arranged to have a couple of my girl friends join me at the boy's table. I didn't stop talking to the boys in my class. If anything, I talked to them more. Just seeing my mother's response to what my teacher said hammered home to me that I was not to listen to that teacher. My teacher was right to say that one person in the class had to change. That one person was not the student. That one person was the teacher. I hope she sees now what I have made of myself. I hope she realizes that it was my difference from the girl she wanted me to become that got me where I am today.

As a ten-year-old girl, I can't imagine what I had to say to President Reagan. Like the rules of where to sit, how to dress, and who to talk to, the idea of the president of the United States seemed to have nothing to do with me, particularly since I wasn't as interested in becoming president as I was in playing ball for the Celtics. I'm beginning to understand, however, that our country's leaders have a lot to do with who we are and who we can become. A good president, I suppose, can be a lot like a good teacher, a good principal, or a good coach.

I'm forced to think about such things on a flight to Washington to job with President Clinton. I missed our team's visit to the White House because I was in Europe with the USA National Team. Unbeknownst to me, ever since that visit UConn alumni in Washington had been working with Connecticut's senators and representatives, trying to set up a time for me to meet the president. They had been touching base with my brother, Jason, but he didn't tell me exactly what they were up to. It was hard because all the planning took place right after I returned from Europe with the National Team when I felt like there were a million strings attached to my body and a million hands pulling them in all different directions. I voiced my frustrations to my brother about my schedule, and apparently he felt it was better if he didn't mention that another string was attached.

So, following two weeks of nonstop appearances in Connecticut and day trips to New York for various events, my brother informed me of the possibility of meeting the president. We were in Boston for yet another banquet and he casually asked me if I would like to go running with the president. I was so tired and worn out that I said no. Of course, I didn't think that the offer was in any way serious. Two days later, when he told me that we were leaving for Washington, I felt a bit lost and overwhelmed. It wouldn't be the first or the last time I felt that way.

I met Jason and his boss David at their office and we drove together to the airport. Since the season ended I had gotten quite accustomed to flying first class, so I could do nothing but laugh when we pulled up to the ValuJet terminal. The plane was late in arriving so the three of us chatted and joked while we waited. We were quite certain that we were the only people in the airport who were going to meet the president. If not, we knew that any others were on a different airline! Fortunately, my brother got the seat next to the woman who never stopped talking, and I was able to sleep the entire flight. We arrived at the UConn Alumni Club about half an hour late. It was a good opportunity to meet people and say a lot of thank you's as they continually congratulated me on our team's success. The number of people's lives that were touched by our basketball team will never cease to amaze me. I eventually crawled into bed around midnight. While I was lying in bed it finally hit me that in seven short hours I would be lacing up my Reeboks for a run with the president. Good thing I was completely exhausted or there is no way I would have fallen asleep.

Jason, David, and I were picked up by Ted Haddad from the UConn Club and driven to the White House. Jason and David were also dressed in running attire hoping they'd be able to jump in on the jog. After we cleared security and the car passed the sniff test by the dogs, we drove up to the front door of the White House. We felt good about everything except the fact that Ted had a big bumper sticker on the back of his Cadillac that read "Bob Dole for President." I could just imagine President Clinton seeing the sticker and telling me to take a hike over to Mr. Dole's office and ask *him* if he wanted to go for a run. Fortunately, Ted scraped the sticker off right after we arrived.

We sat in a room and waited for further instructions. Two other people who were running with the president that morning waited with us. One was a woman whose husband was in the military and was about to be shipped off somewhere, and the other was an old friend of the president's from Arkansas. At about 7:30 am. I looked up and saw President Clinton walk through the doorway. He was yawning and stretching his arms over his head like most people do right after waking up. He wore black sweat pants and a black tee shirt, and I was pleased to see the UConn women's basketball National Champions hat given to him by my team perched on his head. His face was very red, but he basically looked exactly like he did on television. I don't know why he wouldn't have. He was fairly tall, about 6'2", and much thinner in person than I had imagined. I stood and greeted him. He asked me when I was going to Oxford. Apparently the aides who remembered to give him the UConn hat forgot to tell him that the Rhodes people booted me from consideration back in November. He also commented on our season and the team's visit to the White House.

The three invited runners and Mr. Clinton got into his limousine and took a ten minute ride to the site of our jog. He chatted with us the whole time. The more he spoke, the more comfortable I felt. He talked about getting to sleep late because he was waiting up for Chelsea to get home the night before. This struck me as funny because my dad always had the same difficulty sleeping when his kids were out. He couldn't slip into his comfortable snore

until all his children were home. The president also voiced his frustration with the fact that he was no longer able to run in downtown D.C. now that a person had opened fire on the White House with an automatic weapon. (I made no comparison to my father at this point.) At last, we reached the park where we were to run.

When we got out of the car, I realized how many people were with us. There had been police cars and vans following the limo the whole time. I hadn't really noticed them before. I felt bad that our president needs this kind of security, although I must admit I never felt so safe preparing to go for a jog.

We started our run and Jason and David were able to join in. I ran behind the president for the first one and a half miles, with the fear of catching the president's legs and tripping him never far from my mind. That would have been great for my image – I would have gone from Rebecca Lobo: the basketball player from Connecticut, to Rebecca Lobo: the woman who had shown up in a "Bob Dole for President" car and tripped Mr. Clinton from behind.

Right before we reached the press, the president invited me to run beside him. I was on his right when we reached the horde of photographers and journalists shouting questions to him about some vote. He smiled and ignored their inquiries. When we were out of earshot he remarked, "I never answer their questions." I had to laugh. We continued to chat until we finished the three-mile jog. I was so caught up in our run that I never noticed the boats on the river or the agents with binoculars along the riverbank looking for anything suspicious. What I did notice were the people's faces as we ran by them. Some were completely amazed while others acted as if they saw the president every day. I appreciated the ones who were nonchalant. They realized the president was a human being just like they were. Then again, perhaps they were just Republicans.

My brother and David joined us in the limousine for the ride back to the White House. The limo was a bit cramped since four of the six people in it were over six feet tall. It also smelled quite a bit worse than the rose garden we were to walk through as soon as we arrived at the president's home. I don't remember if the windows in the car were tinted, but they didn't need to be because we fogged them up so completely on the return trip. The gossip columnists would have had a field day if they had seen the president's limousine drive by with those windows.

When we arrived, the president gave us a personal tour of the Oval Office and his private office. He took great pride in many of the personal objects on his shelves and delighted in giving us detailed descriptions of them. After about forty-five minutes, the president, responding to the impatience of one of his aides, went to start the rest of his day. I had been somewhat wary of keeping him from his job but he seemed a little reluctant to go. Afterward, we took a tour of the rest of the White House and then began the journey home. I no longer felt as oppressed as I had earlier, nor did I feel the tug of those millions of strings in the same way after that. Instead, as I settled down in my seat of a puddle-jumper airline, I felt relaxed and happy. Looking around, Jason, David and I smiled and shared the secret pleasure of the day. Jason craned his head over the back of his seat and remarked, "Not a bad twenty-four hours, huh, Bec!?"

When I wrote that letter to Ronald Reagan, I may not have imagined that I would one day run with the president of the United States. I may not have dreamed that I would get a personal tour of the White House. However, I was never told by my parents that I could NOT do any of these things. I was never told by my parents that I could NOT play for the Boston Celtics or the New York Giants. If I had heard such words, then perhaps I would have listened to my teacher, started having doubts about my femininity, whatever. I never would have played basketball. I never would have run with the president. I never would have written a book.

When I look back, I see that growing up doesn't happen all at once or even gradually, but in fits and starts. The year I wrote to President Reagan, wrote the note about the substitute teacher's mustache, and was told to dress and act more like a lady, was also the year I stopped believing in Santa Claus. I came home from school one day and found my mother in the kitchen cooking dinner. I put my books down and asked her in a rush of words:

"Mom, the kids were talking at school and they said there was no Santa Claus. I said there was no Santa Claus, too, but then I remember that time when we didn't have a lot of money for Christmas, but we still got the Ping-Pong table. So people are telling me there is no Santa Claus and I kind of think there is no Santa, but then things happen where I think there is one. So is there?"

My mom stopped stirring the pot on the stove and looked me straight in the eye and told me there was no such thing as Santa Claus. I started bawling and before I knew it she was crying, too. Just because she's my mom, I guess. When we finally stopped she said, "But promise me not to tell Jason or your father because they don't know." I promised her.

Even without Santa and the Boston Celtics, I was taught that anything was possible. I wasn't born with that knowledge, I was *taught* it. Each day something happens in my life that proves it to be true.

Source: Lobo, R., & Lobo, R. (1996). *The home team: Of mothers, daughters, and American champions*. New York: Kodansha International.

Recommended Movies for Guided Viewing of Film Sessions

Coming of Age – Elementary

Because of Winn Dixie
My Girl
My Girl II
Frankie and Hazel
The Man in the Moon
Diary of a Wimpy Kid
The Sandlot
Wide Awake
I'll Remember April

Coming of Age – Middle/High School

Lucas
The Sandy Bottom Orchestra
Me, Earl and the Dying Girl

Spunky Gifted Girls – Elementary

Madeline
Ramona and Beezus

Resilient Gifted Children

Coat of Many Colors
Ellen Foster
Pictures of Hollis Woods

Emotionally Intense Children

Extremely Loud, Incredibly Close

Culturally Diverse Gifted Students

Akeelah and the Bee
Finding Forrester
The Red Sneakers

For Gifted Girls Only – High School

Mona Lisa Smile
Bend It Like Beckham
Norma Rae
Paradise Road
The Prize Winner

Father-Son Relationships

Smoke Signals
The War
October Sky

Biographies

The Iron Lady
Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision
Viva La Causa
RFK
Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom
42: The Jackie Robinson Story
Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story
The Theory of Everything

Inspirational Civil Rights Stories

The Ernest Green Story
Ruby Bridges
Selma, Lord Selma
The Long Walk Home
The Tuskegee Airmen

Significant Mentors

The Great Debaters
Pride
Freedom Writers
Stand and Deliver

Moral Development in Gifted Students

Dead Poets Society
With Honors
The Emperor's Club
Gross Anatomy

Twice-Exceptional Challenges

A Mile in His Shoes
Temple Grandin
The Mighty

Inspirational Teachers

School of Life
Mr. Holland's Opus

Documentaries

Mad Hot Ballroom
Spellbound

Animated Films for Young Children

Up
Everyone's Hero
The Little Engine that Could
Stuart Little
Inside Out

Social & Emotional Development of Talented Students

Helpful Resources

- Adderholdt, M. & Goldberg, J. (1999). *Perfectionism: What's bad about being too good?* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Bothmer, S. (2003). *Creating the peaceable classroom: Techniques to calm, uplift, and focus teachers and students.* Tucson, AZ: Zephyr Press.
- Canfield, J. & Wells, H. C. (1994). *One hundred ways to enhance self-concept in the classroom.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Crist, J. J. (2004). *What to do when you're scared and worried: A guide for kids.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Greenspon, T. S. (2007). *What to do when good enough isn't good enough.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Greenspon, T. S. (2002). *Freeing our families from perfectionism.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Halsted, J. W. (2009). *Some of my best friends are books* (3rd ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.
- Hébert, T. P. (2011). *Understanding the social and emotional lives of gifted students.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Lewis, B. A. (1995). *The kid's guide to service projects.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Lewis, B. A. (1998). *The kid's guide to social action.* (2nd ed.). Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Lewis, B. A. (1998). *What do you stand for?* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Mendaglio, S. (Ed.). (2008). *Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration.* Scottsdale, AZ; Great Potential Press.
- Neihart, M., Reis, S. M., Robinson, N.M., & Moon, S.M. (2002). *The social and emotional development of gifted children: What do we know?* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.
- Peterson, J. S. (2008). *The essential guide to talking with gifted teens.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Piechowski, M. M. (2014). *"Mellow Out," they say. If only I could: Intensities and sensitivities of the young and bright.* (2nd ed.). Unionville, NY: Royal Fireworks Press.

Rivero, L. *The smart teens' guide to living with intensity: How to get more out of life and learning*. Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press.

Rusch, E. (2002). *Generation fix: Young ideas for a better world*. Hillsboro, OR: Beyond Words Publishing.

Wilson, H. W. & Adelson, J. (2009). *Letting go of perfect: Overcoming perfectionism in kids*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

These are very powerful . . . Implement whatever you can.

Take a 10-30 minute walk every day. And while you walk, smile. It is the ultimate anti-depressant.

Sit in silence for at least 10 minutes each day. Buy a lock if you must.

Tape your late night shows and get more sleep.

When you wake up in the morning, complete the following statement, "My purpose is to . . . today."

Live with the 3E's – Energy, Enthusiasm, and Empathy.

Play more games and read more books than you did last year.

Make time to practice meditation, yoga, tai chi, and prayer. They provide us with daily fuel for our busy lives.

Spend more time with people over the age of 70 and under the age of 6.

Eat more foods that grow on trees and plants and eat less food that is manufactured in plants.

Drink green tea and plenty of water. Eat blueberries, wild Alaskan salmon, broccoli, almonds and walnuts.

Try to make at least 3 people smile each day.

Clear your clutter from your house, your car, your desk and let new and flowing energy into your life.

Don't waste your precious energy on gossip, energy vampires, issues of the past, negative thoughts or things you cannot control. Instead invest your energy in the positive present moment.

Realize that life is a school and you are here to learn. Problems are simply part of the curriculum that appear and fade away like algebra class but the lessons you learn will last a lifetime.

Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a college kid with a maxed out charge card.

Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.

Don't take yourself so seriously. No one else does.

You don't have to win every argument. Agree to disagree.

Make peace with your past so it won't spoil the present.

Don't compare your life to others'. You have no idea what their journey is all about.

No one is in charge of your happiness except you.

Frame every so-called disaster: "In 5 years, will this matter?"

Forgive everyone for everything.

What other people think of you is none of your business.