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Excellence in Education: What Does it Mean to Me?

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The following four essays were submitted in the Spring 1992 honors scholarship competition at CCCC.

Excellence in Education: What it Means to Me

Jayne Creelman

About this time last year I spent a great deal of time on the couch, eating Oreos, and watching *Days of Our Lives*. The memory pains me. This Spring I find myself in a college library, quietly sneaking trail mix, and contemplating excellence in education. A marked improvement; surprisingly of my own making.

Returning to college is a gift I have given myself. It is also a gift that is passed from teacher to student and back again with no separation. Education is not like money (when it is given away, it's gone), but learning grows with its exchange and becomes more abundant with each offering. Excellence in education requires nurturing. Good educators and students work at creating a "clearing" for one another to discover areas of interest and talent and allow for experimentation

with possibilities. Student and teacher should expect top performance from each other, meaning honest and concerted effort, and be interested enough to challenge when less is given. Though they take no oath as doctors do, educators have an obligation to expect excellence from students and, with the expectation, are likely to get it. Students in turn will enter their world with the knowledge and confidence to educate and contribute to others.

Education is self-love in action. A return to college for me after a twelve year absence was intimidating at best; however, the sense of accomplishment gained at going beyond my previous limits of mediocrity far outshines the initial fears. And as for *Days of Our Lives*, well, I believe that's why a well-educated someone invented the VCR.

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Many educators find the enticement of reform crusades and quests for excellence irresistible. With the traditional logic of true believers, they strand themselves upon Medusa islands of programs, policies, and agendas. I support their right to mental suicide; excellence is not democratic. It recognizes neither the consensus nor the limits of the times.

Educationally, excellence is the passionate Nemesis of compliance and definition. Education is a passion. It is the sparked and kindled fire of romance, the magic and wonder of transformation, the result of imagination tempered with experience. Excellence resides in the endeavor itself, in the spirit, and never

within the labyrinth of the profane. It is a quality that transcends the obscenity of words. And yet, it is in words that excellence has its genesis. For, excellence is a human quality. Being such, it needs the generation and sustenance derived from positive verbal interaction between students and teachers-as-students.

Ironically, the same intangibles that free excellence from the bounds of mediocrity are those that competition, control, and label infected intellectual atmospheres dread and discount most. The labyrinth of the profane is immense; books and bones and pretenders all have their paid defenders. Excellence, meanwhile, remembers falls as lessons and failures as preludes to ascent.