

488 Days and 244,000 Words Later

A Mid-Program Retrospective



In a recent visit to my parents' house, I sorted through a box of my childhood mementoes, re-discovering things like those fake soccer trophies and the first gift I ever got from a boy (a plastic Annie necklace). There were several year's worth of my diaries, written in handwriting I didn't recognize, and with the voice of a girl I barely remembered.

PORTFOLIO REVIEW

By Dawn Bovasso

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My eight year-old self had listed out her three life goals, and though I don't remember writing any of it, I wasn't surprised to see that these were the same goals I'd been holding onto fiercely for the past 25 years.

First, I wanted to make \$100,000. I have no idea where I got this number, but back in 1984, it probably sounded like a lot of money. I think this goal was really about being self-sufficient and independent, and I've certainly achieved that. I'm happy and proud that I can support myself in one of the world's most expensive cities.

Second, I wanted to be what I called, back then, a "solo mom." I described toting my baby around in a designer sling as I shopped at the farmer's market, though of course back then I called it a "pouch," and instead of a "farmer's market," I referred to "ShopRite," which isn't quite as hipster. Again, I've no idea where I got this idea from either, as I come from an average white picket fence family, but I've always been happy kicking around on my own. Anyway, I do hope my baby is on the horizon soon, and I can't wait to dress her in a Syracuse onesie and lull her to sleep by explaining the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods.

Finally, my third goal. I wanted a PhD. Yes, at even eight years old. Back then, I had an intrinsic desire to know everything about every book ever written, and a love for the culture and community of higher education, though I had no idea what the degree actually meant or how it would impact my life. When you're an eight-year-old writing in your puffy diary, these kinds of esoteric goals are great – but what does it mean when you are 35 and trying to make a life for yourself?

It means that by the time I actually started this program, I was a bit more pragmatic: I was driven, in part, by my desire to provide for myself and the baby I might someday have, to make myself more marketable. I wanted to be an expert in a subject I love, and to be immersed in a culture that values this knowledge.

Now, here I am, half-way through, and I am changed for the better in ways I could never have imagined. My academic portfolio has grown exponentially and beautifully, and I am astounded and grateful to this program for encouraging me to produce so much extraordinary content and thought leadership.

I had a job interview recently, and as I found myself saying things that I know I would not – could not – have said a year ago, I had an out of body experience, watching myself sound like an expert in a field of really smart people. It was, in large part, because of this program.

Yet somewhere along the way, my main goal – to boost my resume and career – has become secondary to the actual experience and how it is changing me as a person. It's difficult to pinpoint exactly when this happened, but I think this might have started one of those crazy nights at Faegan's. Or it may have been the day I submitted my first conference paper – a paper on a topic I didn't even realize I was interested in until it poured out of me in a beautiful rush. Or it may have been the day we sent 100 emails talking about jeggings. Or it might have been the Saturday night I made an ontology on superfoods. Or maybe it was the day I started giving fancy theoretical names to everyday behaviors, and how this often makes my boss choke on his water. Or it might be every morning when I have a hot cup of coffee and read Jake's email.

And it is, definitely, when I come here and see all of you. And it is, definitely, every day when I learn from all of you.

So this is the diary entry of a 34-year-old woman, and I can honestly tell both my eight-year-old self and the academic powers that be that I am happily on my way to achieving my goals, both personally and professionally – and that even all these years later, they are what matters to me the most. I can only imagine what awesomeness the second half of this program will bring: the experiences I will have, the words I will write, and the person I will become.