

THE STATESMAN

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Announcements:

Any veteran or their dependants, who qualifies for the G.I. Bill, may now apply their veteran's benefits toward tuition at GWC.

The George Wythe College Alumni Association now officially organized, is hosting The First Annual Alumni and Friends Gala in conjunction with Commencement Exercises October 14th and 15th in Cedar City, Utah. [Click Here](#)

Need a Financial Mentor? Don't miss the new GWC seminar by proven financial mentors at the GWC quality. [Click Here](#)

Seminars:

August 17-18 [Summer Seminar: Shakespeare](#)

August 2-28 [Summer Seminar: The Great Political Thinkers](#)

September 1 [School Starts On-Campus](#)

For a Face to Face with Greatness seminar in your area, [click here.](#)

Socrates once said,
"There is only one good, knowledge
and one evil, ignorance."

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For more newsletters, [click here.](#)

Providence with Liber: My Field Experience in Ennu

They were the sophomore class of 2000, specifically my fifth hour English class. Their names were Tim, Asia, Lynette, Dallas... and together they were children of the desolate, and on one particular day I held everything back, which is opposite the phrase that says, "Don't hold anything back."

As students of the performing arts, they would come into my class just after lunch, all loud and bouncing off the walls, singing and acting in eager anticipation of more of the same after English was over. Having drama to the left and dance to the right of my class made my job especially difficult. My students were always oversupplied with the center of energy, much like my first hour seniors as well as my second and third hour juniors, all of whom suffered from the same but with less electricity. The school, in its second year, was Tuacahn High School for the Performing arts. I was the entire English department, and my sophomores had just climbed to the neck of my impatience.

Before I continue let me set the stage, for prior to taking the position at Tuacahn I was given a cargo of 210 students at a traditional high school. I say cargo because that is how I felt about the students;



they were an unbearable weight of responsibility to teach reading and writing skills to every day, six times a day. Depression, sickness and discouragement consumed me. I passed out once in the bathroom and my wife took me to the emergency room on several occasions because I could not handle the panic, which came not from the apathy of the students, which was bad, but from the overwhelming and impossible task of teaching that many students in the face of such high idealism.

I began to ask, "Would a company require a manager to supervise over 200 people without several assistant managers?" With four years of college teaching under my belt, I could not live up to what teaching should be. And it was not that I had once reached my ideal either, but that I would never reach it that made me so sick.

Therefore, in the second year at this high school, and after losing forty pounds and working a second job tending bar at night, I came across John Taylor Gatto's *Dumbing us Down*. If a truly great teacher could quit and feel okay about it, then certainly a very depressed teacher could do the same. I resigned in the spring of 1999, just short of sadness turning to cynicism. I was sad to leave a handful of students, mostly my debate team that I had come to love, especially Ben, Sam, Wayne and others.

The next fall I went back to teaching part time at a local college, only to find more student indifference than subsequently realized. Apathy was oozing to the top of the education food chain. Soon I was offered a job to build the language arts curriculum for Utah's first charter high school, which brings us back to Tuacahn. I took the job and thought it would be different.

After a few months, I privately came to call the school Tuacahn High School for the Alternative Arts. As a new school, it became a quick replacement for students kicked out of other local schools and it was also a place for various quirks in personality to spread their wings, if you could imagine. Many, surprisingly, found it appealing for the uniform requirement and the low student/teacher ratios. As a former actor in Hollywood, I thought I could handle 130 students, much fewer, but still not low enough.

Before I came across George Wythe College, I felt a strong need to mentor and be close to the learning of my students, just as was done to me by two powerful mentors in my life. Although the anxiety and panic never surfaced with my new position at Tuacahn, I started to become negative, until one day ennui set in like a cold storm.

I even said it out loud to my fifth hour sophomores. I said, "You all suffer from ennui and I am sick at the core." I said it while reading Emerson and nobody wanted to listen, and, it seemed at the time, that nobody heard me. Instead, they wanted to play. They wanted to be entertained and to entertain. They wanted a show-and-tell-day and to be the center of it all. I then decided to take to heart something my father once said, "Never give a gift that will not be received." And so, in the true spirit of holding everything back, I said with a smile and with uplifted energy, "Let's play a game. Let's play heads down thumbs up." Sadly, they got excited and we played the game.

It was easy; they were all devoted and orderly about the event. I had control of the class and an odd euphoria came over me as if I was a great teacher. They were quiet, attentive, and deeply involved in the game, and I did this for several days, heads down and thumbs up. I took roll at the start of class and then picked four students to start the game, and that was it. That's all I had to do. For myself, I just sat at my desk and was able to organize my drawer and catch up on other things. I even surfed the net a few times while the class played a children's game.

Something was wrong, though, and Amie, a student of vocal concern, started to get upset and bored, and so after a back-and-forth small debate with her I allowed her to sit outside and read Emerson quietly to herself. She took the offer and the next day other students, equally bored, were given the same option to play the children's game or read quietly outside. By the next week half the class was outside the classroom. Some chose to read Emerson; most sat and discussed, in a soft voice, the lunacy of Mr. Kelsch inside.

Curious about their unusually quiet talk, I decided to sit with them and leave the remaining few to play alone, which dwindled to nothing after a boring day of hangman. Soon, we were all out of class, talking like adults, quietly, as if big brother was

watching. We were breaking the rules and I was not taking roll.

I will never forget what happened next. I told them about the high school I just left. I told them about my depression, or black dog as Winston Churchill called it, and about what I thought learning should be. I gave them several essays and full length arguments about the system of education we were stuck in. I shared all that I dreamed and had in mind to be. I gave them an essay by John Taylor Gatto and then I handed them *Fahrenheit 451*. They relished it in one week. Yes, we read and discussed a book in a week. They all became seriously bothered, and even more affected when we jumped into *Brave New World*, which took two weeks. We read *Hamlet* after that and jumped around literature like it was a candy store. My office was filled at lunch and discussion never seemed to slow down. I directed their minds where their questions drove them, even if it meant deeper water than what they were used to. Surprisingly, this raised a few eyebrows.

Many students wanted to know why there was fear and evil in the world, and in true mentor character, I stepped out of my bounds and found a griping essay by Ernest Becker which summarized his book *The Denial of Death*. As student actors, they were given snippets of Otto Rank's *Art and Artist*, and it was at this time that we learned that a student's father committed suicide some years past. We also heard of students from a local high school that were killed in an automobile accident due to reckless driving. My students could not understand these things and so I finally, for the first time, held nothing back. I asked them to return to the classroom where I retold an event when I was in school. It began like this:

"A teenager pulled out of the local Dairy Queen in his hot rod pickup and sped down the boulevard. Many watched him burn rubber and hydroplane over a film of water left from a recent rainstorm. Tragically, the teen swerved into the opposite lane and crashed into a diesel truck approaching from the opposite direction. All three friends in the back were thrown out and killed instantly. Two others in the front, including his girlfriend, were killed. The teen driver survived with a broken rib and a crushed foot. Let me ask, why did he do it?"

"He was stupid," replied a student.

"Stupidity does not explain his motive. Why did he do it?" I asked.

Another student said, "He needed to feel powerful?"

"Why did he need to feel powerful?" I returned.

"Because he felt insecure," said the same student.

"About what?" I asked.

"Himself, I guess, heck I don't know."

"Yes you do know. Why did he need to feel powerful?"

"Because nobody liked him," said Amie.

"What does it mean when nobody likes you?"

"It means you are not recognized," said Asia.

"What does it mean to not be recognized?"

"It means you are not powerful," said Amie again.

"We have used that explanation already. What does it mean to not be recognized?" At about this time many gave up because we all become frustrated for the same reason when our vocabulary is empty or when we refuse the logic that is obvious. But the students did not give up as I continued with the questions.

"Because he did not want to feel unimportant," said another student.

"Why the need to feel important?" I asked.

"Because he just did not want to feel unimportant," repeated the student.

"What does it mean to feel unimportant?" I then asked emphasizing the word "mean." When you ask what something means, you force the mind to define.

"It means...that...you are not looked up to," said Dallas.

"What does it 'mean' to not be looked up to?"

I asked.

“It means nobody likes you,” said Amie.

They found themselves lost in a circle, so I repeated the question slowly for the class to help focus the issue, “What...does...it...mean...when nobody...likes you?”

“...You have no...meaning,” said a quiet Darby with hesitant reflection.

“What does it mean to have no meaning?”

“It means you are...alone,” said Darby.

“What does it mean to be all alone?” I asked.

“That is nothingness,” piped Neal, a freshman who snuck into my fifth hour class without me knowing.

“What is nothingness?” I asked with a stern look at him.

“Empty space” said Dallas to the side.

“What is empty space?”

“Oblivion,” said the freshman in trouble.

“What is oblivion?” asked another student.

“That is death,” said Tim in the back with the confidence that comes when you place another in checkmate.

“So, let me get this straight. The teen sped in his truck to get the attention of all those watching in order to feel important so as to have meaning, which he needed to deny his fear of rejection, which is really a symbol of death?” All the students sat puzzled and even frustrated. An honor student near the center of the class said, “Can’t you just say he was insecure? How does death enter the picture?”

“They are the same,” I said. “Is not rejection a symbol of death, at least as stated in the writings of Otto Rank, William James, Norman O Brown and even Shakespeare.” The class sat quiet for a while and started to connect ideas and experiences they had never linked. Some even developed a blank stare, especially a particular honor student not prone to conceptual linking that did not offer a ready-quick answer. I then welcomed them to “The Human Condition,” and the

bell rang, for once, at the right time.

Lunch in the cafeteria was busy with talk. The lecture came to be known as “The big picture lecture,” and other students would play the Socratic role and ask a similar line of questioning to other students. They were demanding that others define and make sense of human motives that are obvious but rarely taught as obvious. They revealed the psychology of their favorite musicians and typical teen antics; they saw politics in a new light, and a few could see (and accept) the fear in their own parents. Last came the virtue of self knowledge where some students became bothered with their own black dog for a while and most increased in their personal and social responsibility. Take away the defensive posture of denial, and private virtue is given fresh air to breath.

Many of these students found their way to my home on occasion, and nearly one third of the entire school joined my debate team. I have mentored many students on an individual basis, but never an entire class. I looked forward to fifth hour English, and even to all my classes, but it was fifth hour English that lifted my heart. They inspired my wife to submit my name to be nominated as a torchbearer for the 2002 Olympics, and on that cold night I carried a flame of fire above my head and, in the crowd, several of my students ran alongside with smiles brighter than the flame held above my head.

It was a sad day when I left the next year to take a position in higher education, and yet they still came to my house, and they continue even to this day with emails and questions, and I give them things to read and ask them questions to see where their minds are, and I always give my own thoughts in the exchange, but never in the context that my answer is the truth. I always say that the truth is like the Grand Canyon and that you know nothing unless you understand the history in each layer of strata. Luckily I understood human fear, which I used to connect the dots to other things. A mentor is a book and a librarian. On one hand he has a singular strength, a kind of active world view, and on the other hand he knows what else can be found in the library.

In May of 2003, my fifth hour English graduated and I was there to honor them. Today, some are serving their country in the military, many are

attending colleges throughout the west, and nearly all have some kind of scholarship or dream to propel them. My only regret is not learning about George Wythe College sooner.

A liber education is about letting go as a teacher and allowing students' questions to surface. It is also more than this, for if I had not been ready with some basic literature or the knowledge that took me some years to figure out; I would have missed the chance to be a mentor. And had I not let go and allow my class to appear "off task," I would have missed the chance of leadership.

A liber education is yours throughout your life, a slow line upon line process of personal responsibility leading into social responsibility, which I have recently learned is private virtue leading into public virtue. It is not a curriculum of must-know information, and it is not a bell to stop you in mid thought. It is a need to understand and a willingness to stand for that need mutually as mentor and student. More importantly, over time a liber education, for both student and teacher, holds nothing back. The greatest ideas were never passed from teacher to student in a semester of school. They were passed from classic to mentor to reader and back to mentor. Read, write and respond, this back and forth dual mentor/student relationship in the face of greatness lasted for years, and over time they came to all each other friends.

Today I had lunch with a friend, Dallas is his name. He is leaving to join the military Ranger Corp. Smart and bored with college, even with a 4.0 GPA and a full tuition-paid scholarship, he is looking for something more. I mentioned George Wythe College, and his choice is mentorship with me through distance communiqués. He is currently reading *The Republic*. There is Tim also, a young man who came to my class with a huge chip on his shoulder and hair to match the attitude. He is now saving for college to study science. His assignment is Isaac Asimov's series on *Particles*, *Neutrino's* etc. and there is Asia, the one who would never stand for anything less than an "A." She is now willing to sacrifice a grade for an education. There is Arwen studying philosophy, who recently demanded a one-on-one lecture dealing with the predicate reality, which is a four-hour seminar on how to select definition. I held nothing back that night. There is also Bryaun who just returned from a school in California.

She too felt boxed in and I quickly mentioned George Wythe College during a recent visit. A week later Ciana and Lauren showed up to talk about George Wythe College.

That fifth hour group keeps in touch, and a student not well known recently asked, "Do I suffer from ennui still?" Thinking that nobody heard me that day, I said, "No! But I once did, and let me tell you, it is something to fear."

Many teachers complain about student apathy, and I was one of them. And because students would not listen to me, I became sick within. Had I known sooner that mentoring is listening to them and their questions and not what I had to say, I could have avoided much heartache and pain. Ask any student what love or joy or truth is, as I have done, and if you are not equipped with sound definitions to challenge their budding concepts, then you are not prepared to mentor and they will sense it. I was prepared in the letter of virtue, if there is such a thing, but not in the spirit of virtue. Two wonderful mentors gave me the former and providence led me to the later.

Today, when my students leave my home and when they write an email asking me to respond to their essays, a sense of faith wipes away the darkness that nearly overcame my hope. And since they will not stop coming, I have found George Wythe College as a place to improve upon what they keep coming for and for what my own children have just stared to demand from me. Therefore, if not for any achievement or accomplishment of my own, and if none of my students choose George Wythe College as a place to continue their education, then at least for the private virtue needed to always remain their most obedient and humble servant.

Keith R. Kelsch

Alumni

Socrates once said, “There is only one good, knowledge and one evil, ignorance.”

“The First Annual Alumni and Friends Gala” is an opportunity to celebrate those who have gained that “good knowledge”, who have paid the price to earn a Liberal Arts education and commence the path to Statesmanship. It is a time marked with joy and respect for the sacrifices made along the way. It is also a time to associate with those who have sacrificed and supported George Wythe College with resources of time, money and expertise.

Come join us for two days of incredible lectures, activities and memory making events as well as reminiscing about when you were here.

To register for the “First Annual Alumni and Friends Gala” Oct. 14th and 15th please contact Elizabeth Smailes at esmailes123@yahoo.com.

For questions and comments concerning the Alumni and Association please contact Sandra Stapley at sjstapley@gwc.edu.

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