

Intellectual Autobiography example  
Panhuis 2015

If I were to try and share all of my relevant experiences in this essay, then I would violate the rules of the assignment. So, I share only a few general childhood experiences that have provided me with two lifelong values, which I have entitled “No Guts, No Glory” and “Dance to the music”. Although at first these values may not seem “intellectual,” they facilitate how I think and learn, and I believe they embody the spirit of an “Intellectual Autobiography”.

Value #1 “No Guts, No Glory”: I grew up a lucky girl. My dad did not seem to get hung up on the fact that he had two daughters and no sons. He liked to take us camping, fishing, skiing, biking, hiking, golfing, kayaking...you name it, we did it. I like to say I am the “queen of mediocrity” at every outdoor activity because I was exposed to them all, but never truly mastered any. Regardless of my skill level at these activities, I have no doubt that my experiences have facilitated an adventurous spirit – an ability to say “yes” to new journeys. My dad instilled in me the value of trying new things— a theme that now permeates not only my outdoor adventures, but also my scientific research goals and classroom lesson plans.

Along these same lines, my parents took us on vacation. One of our yearly vacations was a family ski trip “out west” (as we grew up in Ohio). Since I was about six years old we traveled to the mountains of Colorado. Without trepidation, I followed my dad down every kind of slope from green to black diamond, from easy cruisers to steep and mogul-lined. Fear was not in my vocabulary. During one of those ski vacations when I was about eight years old, I bought an iron-on, three-quarter sleeve, T-shirt (it was the 80’s and iron-on was cool). The T-shirt had a sparkly skier on the front with the slogan “No Guts, No Glory” shimmering across the top. I can still picture it when I close my

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eyes. It brings a big smile to my face because it became my motto from that day forward. Every new adventure I pursue or difficult situation I encounter I try to remember to repeat the words, “No Guts, No Glory,” and to remember my fearless kid-self shimmering down a black diamond run.

Value #2 “Dance to the music”: My dad may have instilled in me a sense of adventure and fearlessness, but it was my mother who introduced me to music and the liberation that comes with dancing. You see, my mother is a pianist; most evenings she would sit at the piano in our living room and play Bach, Mozart, Chopin, and many other composers. As she played I would float and dance around the living room – just letting go. The music would consume me and I was free to spin and move to the rhythms with no inhibition. No one was there, not even my older sister, to say, “Stop dancing...you look like a fool...be still.” No, I imagine my mother just looked over at me and smiled from behind the piano. This freedom I experienced growing up instilled in me a sense of what it feels like to let go of inhibitions – to just dance!

The values I gained from the life experiences I shared above relate best to Cronon’s qualities #3 (*They can talk with anyone.*), # 5 (*They can solve a wide variety of puzzles and problems.*), and # 7 (*They practice humility, tolerance, and self-criticism*). Here is why. First, # 3. Experiences from travel and adventures provided me with talking points and an ability to find common ground with others. I try to call on these familiarities to talk with anyone and to find out more about them. Second, #5. There were always challenges that came with trying to learn something new or traveling to unfamiliar places; thus, these experiences helped me learn how to solve a variety of problems. Also, when I remember the value of lowering my inhibitions I become more adaptable to

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difficult situations and able to solve many puzzles. Third, #7. When learning something new, there was always failure and mistakes. No one puts on a pair of skis for the first time and doesn't fall; no one is perfect. In fact, whenever I would fall on the ski slope my dad would say, "falling makes you a better skier – it means you are pushing yourself" (or sometimes he would just say, "Oh, a snow snake got you!"). Along with falling and failure comes humility, tolerance, and self-criticism.

I started the above paragraph mentioning three of Cronon's qualities I best relate to; these are also the ones I believe I have strongly cultivated (but in no way mastered). I am still using my life experiences, past and present, to help shape me as a learner and thinker. I continue to travel and take adventures outside my comfort zone; and I strive to lower my inhibitions and dance to the music.

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*Postscript to UC 160 assignment prompt: Things I am interested in exploring at OWU.*

*[This is just of a few of the things I was interested in exploring at OWU when I started my faculty career at OWU]*

- What is the faculty governance system at OWU all about and what role will I play in the system?
- What are the students like at OWU?
- How can I encourage students to work in my research lab?
- What service projects are people on campus doing?
- Where is the best coffee shop in town?