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Waves of Life

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A Project in
Creative Studies

by

Valjeta Ahmeti

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Science

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Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers
Project Adviser

April 28, 2013



Valjeta Ahmeti

Candidate

Abstract

The focus of my project is on my mother, Selamije Ahmeti. I have used her life experiences to further understand creative women and to help me understand where my creativity stemmed from. I have accomplished this through several methods such as a questionnaire I made up where I asked her to write down her answers, casual conversations I later transcribed, deliberate conversations I later transcribed and my personal observation. This project also involves the process of self-discovery. I believe there is nothing greater than knowing who you are and what you have to offer to the world. I have found that knowing where you come from plays a big role in the development of creative personalities. My goal is to share with women around the world from my experience that every aspect of creativity is important and should be celebrated. Often, we focus on creative achievement through the means of awards and what we think of as “unreachable creativity.” However, everyone has creative potential and when we use it, we have a great impact, in so many diverse ways that need to be appreciated.

Valjeta Ahmeti

April 28, 2013

Date

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To my mommy, I simply cannot seem to find the words to express my gratitude towards everything you have done for me. There has never been a time where you have not healed my every wound, but also made me see the bright side to everything. I look to you for every question I have and you always seem to have the perfect answer. I am so lucky to have such an amazing person to call my mom.

To my daddy, I know the primary focus was on mom, but you are an especially important part of who I am as well. Thank you for always working so hard to support us and making me laugh on a daily basis. I am so thankful and lucky to not only have you as my dad, but my friend as well. Dua te falimenderoj shum per perkrahje per gjdo rrug si e kom zgjedh ne jet. Apet, dua te famlimenderoj shum!!

To my brother, Valon - Where do I begin? I think half of my creativity comes from finding different ways to escape your torture – hahahaha- I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for all of your support, not just in the stressful time of this project, but my entire college career. You have been there for me every step of the way and every journey I have embarked on. Faleminderit prej zemres.

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To my entire family, thank you for your words of encouragement and belief in me. We may be continents apart, but your support and kind words felt very close. Thank you!

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I wish to acknowledge my advisor, Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers, without whom my project would not have been possible. Thank you for your kind words and encouragement.

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Section 1: Background to the Project

Purpose and Description

I spent a tremendous amount of time deciding my project focus. I have thought about it as far back as opening my acceptance letter into the Creative Studies program. I met with my advisor Dr. Cabra and we talked about what the program entailed and the final project. At that moment, I remember thinking that my project would be the stepping stone to my future. With time, it has become more than that. It has helped me discover myself. It has been almost two years since that day and my decision to write about my mother's life is with great confidence and clarity. This decision would not have been possible without Dr. Susan Keller-Mathers who studied creative women. It was not until the day she presented part of her doctorate findings in one of my classes that I reached a decision. I was very excited because I found someone who could mentor me through this emotional and exciting time in my life.

Hidden in Eastern Europe is the beautiful landlocked country of Kosova. It is bordered by the Republic of Macedonia to the South, Albania to the West and Montenegro to the Northeast. The remaining line of separation is Serbia. In North-Western Kosova, a dynamic woman was born and raised – full of hope and positive thoughts for her future. She was short in height, but her character stood as tall as the black mountains surrounding her. The lush mountains and serene beauty were full of bare memories carrying blood and horror. There came a time to leave everything behind, not by choice, but of fear and a wish for a better life for her family. It is hard to admit defeat, but the force of bullets and grenades did not stand a chance against the powerful force - I call my mother. Little did the enemies know that she had overcome too much to ever quit, just as before she promised to beat the odds and give her children the life every child

deserves. This is the story of Selamije, the woman who does not see obstacles, only opportunities.

Rationale

Ever since I started to pay attention to my mother and the stories she shared about her life, I could not help but take note. In time, it has become more and more apparent to me just how creative she is and I wonder if this is where my creativity stems from. After much reflection I have come to realize that she has been the biggest influence on the creative woman I am today. There is an old saying, “you never know where you are going, unless you know where you come from.” This holds true for me. For this project, I have taken it upon myself to map out my road of self-discovery through my mother’s experiences and what brought me to where I am today.

With this Master’s Project I aim to challenge the misconception of creativity that states that someone needs certain credentials, artistic abilities or awards to be viewed as creative. I believe we all possess creative potential, but it is often the way we are raised that decides the type of creative individual we will become. I seek to discover how I have been influenced and how important it is that you wake up with an idea and make it a reality. E. Paul Torrance (1983) once stated, “One of the most powerful wellsprings of creative energy, outstanding accomplishment, and self-fulfillment seems to be falling in love with something-your dream, your image of the future” (p. 73). It dawned on me that everyone has an image of the future and you can achieve it without great recognition. I believe this is important because everyday creativity shapes people around you when you show great enthusiasm for the creative process. The people around you take notice and start to view things from different angles.

I often think about how compassionate my mother was toward my brother and I growing up. I believe most children get their creativity from their mother as they are the more nurturing of

the two parents. That is not to say that fathers cannot be nurturing and have great influence on their children. I very much adore my father and how he has always provided for his family. However, it is with the view of a nurturing mother that I interpret children growing into adults and learning to do things effectively. My mother gave us the confidence and ability to imagine beyond our wildest dreams. For example, there were no rules or judgment during play time – it was our time. I honestly believe that it is my upbringing, the challenges I have faced and my mother's influence that made me the person I am today.

Section 2: Pertinent Literature

Creativity is typically defined as the ability to produce work that is novel and useful. Most creativity researchers recognize that creativity is not limited only to those who achieve eminence as a result of their creative contributions (Beghetto & Kaufmann, 2007). Research has been limited and little is known about creative women, their creative processes, and the decisions they face about their own productivity (Reis, 2002). “Many people do not fully understand the creative potential of women. We live in a world which realities and daily experiences reinforce certain roles, expectations, and obligations that limit creative opportunities for girls and women. And the creative opportunities that women encounter are often diversified over many different important outlets” (Reis, 2002. p. 315).

Below I have listed some of the most important literature that informed my thinking on creativity and women. While I was doing research for this project, it became apparent to me that a pattern started to appear. Dr. Sally Reis’ scholarly work on creativity and women was a prime source of information on how women give up their creative potential for family. Additionally, John E. Gedo helped further inform my thinking regarding creativity and women. He has a unique blending of clinical experience along with biographical research that truly captures the women’s deep feelings about their creative life.

Gedo, J. E. (2000). The creativity of women. *Annual Of Psychoanalysis*, 28215.

Reis, S. (1991). The need for clarification in research designed to examine gender differences in achievement and accomplishment. *Roepers Review*, 13, 193-198.

Reis, S. (1995). Talent ignored, talent diverted: The cultural context underlying giftedness in Females. *Gifted Child Quarterly*, 42, 162-170.

Reis, S. (2001). Toward a theory of creativity in diverse creative women. In M. Bloom & T. Gullotta (Eds.), *Promoting creativity across the lifespan* (pp. 231-275). Washington, DC: CWLA

Reis, S. (2003). Gifted girls, twenty-five years later: Hopes realized and new challenges found. *Roeper Review*, 25 (4), 154-157.

The following sources also showed a pattern that started to occur. While reading, I found that there were many articles written about personality traits in creative women. There were also a lot of writings about how creative women are eager to help and nurture. I found this especially interesting as my mother was the same way. The sources below include information pertinent to my personal findings.

Bachtold, L., & Werner, E. (1973). Personality characteristics of creative women. *Perceptual And Motor Skills*, 36(1), 311-319.

Helson, R. (1996). In search of the creative personality. *Creativity Research Journal*, 9(4), 295.

Keller-Mathers, S. (2004). *A qualitative study of women of extraordinary creative achievement*. Ann Arbor, MI: UMI ProQuest Co.

Reis, S. (1996). Older women's reflections on eminence: Obstacles and opportunities. In K. Noble & R. Sobotnik (Eds.), *Remarkable women: Perspectives on female talent development* (pp. 149-168). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Schlosser, G. (2001). Stories of success from eminent Finnish women: A narrative study. *High Ability Studies*, 12 (1), 61-87.

Wallace, T. J. (1995). Girls who became famous literalists of the imagination. *Roeper Review*, 18(1), 24.

As part of this project, I have intertwined scholarly sources in section four. The reflection and consideration of these works have helped me shape my project.

Section 3: Process

Qualitative Inquiry

My focus for this project was on conversations and questions to understand my mother's story, similar to what Merriam (2002) describes as narrative analysis in regards to the focus on learning about an individual. Yet, different as this project focused on a more free flowing conversation rather than a research study. The free flowing conversations were later transcribed by me. I also had a deliberate in depth conversation with my mother to get the details I was seeking. Both experience and questions emerged as my project went along. Merriam stated, "The narrative analysis of lives, or life narratives, is currently a popular form of qualitative research. The key to this type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form (p. 6)." Thus, like this more formal research approach, I focused on the first-person account. Specifically focusing on my mother's first-person account allowed me to learn a great deal of detail about her life. It also helped me get in-depth information whenever I felt I needed more.

I developed written questions I wanted to ask my mother. I also listened to the conversations and stories told by my mother. I later transcribed these so that I would have a written copy of them. Third, I have taken the time to reflect on my life and what I have witnessed until now. The interview questions were not formally structured some were written down prior to talking to her and many ideas emerged while working on this project that lead to a variety of questions as well. The sole focus was on my mother, but at some point during the interviews and conversations we shared, I felt like she was not viewing herself as the amazing woman I know her to be. This is when, one afternoon, I began to have casual conversations with my grandmother, my father and my brother where I asked them a series of questions which led me to

transcribe their answers to my questions. This was done in a natural conversation rather than a formal interview as I wanted unbiased answers on how they viewed my mother. What they told me reinforced the belief I had in my mother.

The write up of my project is divided into five parts. The different parts have literature intertwined with my findings. The journey I took to learn about my mother was quite lengthy as it is also something I have reflected on all my life. I began with great reflection on my life and especially my childhood. This led me to develop questions where I asked her to describe her childhood. Her answers were full of details, but at some point I felt that she was not holding herself to the standard that everyone else did. This is when I began to talk to my grandmother and aunts, from those conversations emerged greater details. I took their answers and added them to my mothers. Later, I began to see that my direction focused a lot on her early life. This was important because she was able to achieve a lot in the era in which she lived and part of the world she lived in. I found it intriguing because I saw a lot of myself in my mother.

After more reflection, I started to realize that I truly do resemble my mom in many ways. So, I began to have more conversations with her. This time, I made them seem casual, but I was deliberate about my questions. My mother is very honest and gave me straightforward answers (which I greatly appreciated). Still, I felt that she was holding back. I viewed her differently. This is when I began to have conversations with my family and it further reinforced my perceptions of my mother'. I also began to have a lot of conversations with my mother and grandmother together. I was intrigued with having two generations of wonderful women conversing about their life with me. What came out of those conversations was very surprising to me. Their experiences were somewhat similar, but their approach to solving problems was entirely different. This is where I began to realize that my grandmother was a lot like her mother.

However, my mother is quite different from her mother and I am a lot like my mother. I was surprised to find this as I assumed my grandmother and her were more alike. After all of my data was gathered, I began to realize there was a pattern with my own research and research I was reading.

For the first part of section four, I will talk about how my mother as well as other creative women gave up meaningful work for their families. My mother gave up a lot for her family. Part of it was due to the economic and political situation in Kosova and mostly because she valued her family above her own ambitions. As I was transcribing and gathering my information, I found that she spent a great deal of time talking about her family. This data reoccurred from her childhood to adulthood. I found it even more interesting that there is literature to support women all over the world give up meaningful work for their families.

Second, I will talk about characteristics of creative women and how it relates to my mother and I. While collecting and transcribing data, I saw myself in my mother's descriptions of herself. After, I reviewed her answers, I was surprised at her answers. I was not surprised, however that the research on creative women supported her personality characteristics well.

Third, I will talk about how creative women are nurturing and helpful towards others. Repeatedly my mother talked about how important it is to be caring towards your children as well as others. I was curious and looked to scholarly research to see if other creative women have the same views. I was not surprised to find that they too felt the same way. All of my life I have witnessed my mother being kind. She always says, "When you give with the right hand the left hand should not know about it." This became more apparent in my findings for this project. She is always willing to lend a hand to someone and see that her family and friends were well taken care of.

In the Fourth part, I will also talk about the war in Kosova that led us to the United States of America. Although the war was not a topic of conversation too much during my research, I felt it was an important part of our journey. I started to reflect and realized my mother did not give herself enough credibility during this terrible time in our life. I witnessed her and my father opening our door to complete strangers and feeding them until we literally ran out of food. I looked back and realized I had to ask her more about this. It was during a conversation I had with her about the war I realized just how creative she was; contrary to her belief. It was because of her thinking ahead so many people survived. It was because she thought about the future that we lived to be here today.

In the fifth part, I will sum up how she has helped me discover myself and the creativity I embody. I believe that the greatest gift anyone can give themselves is the opportunity to know who they are. I have also learned that learning about yourself is a process. It is also a lifelong process that needs to change and refine itself every so often. Knowing where you come from and learning from your experiences brings you that much closer.

Section Four: Tangible Outcomes of the Project

A primary outcome of my project included my reflection on different aspects of my life. I began to realize that I have to close in on reoccurring patterns or my project might never end. I also realized that this project does not have to end. I can continue to learn more about my mother as well as myself on a daily basis. Another outcome was the importance of thinking ahead and the impact it can have. People talk about it continuously and often do not have the right mindset or tools to carry through. I have been blessed with genes as well as training on solving any problem and thinking ahead with any situation that may come my way.

The Value of Family

“Love begins at home, and it is not how much we do... but how much love we put in that action.” – Mother Teresa

The word family means different things to different people. In general, the word family stirs up a lot of emotion. This is because families have special bonds that are unbreakable. For my mother and I, family is the basis of our roots and the way we choose to live life. It has been passed down through generations that family is top priority. As a woman, it is especially important that family comes before anything else. It was a great journey to go through my mother’s life and realize just how much family matters. It is something I will forever carry with me as it is also the foundation of my personal belief – family is everything.

In general, women value relationships as much or more than creative work (Reis, 1998). As a group, women are more likely to sacrifice opportunities, self-interest out of altruism, particularly on behalf of their family members (Gedo, 2000). My mother has made many sacrifices on behalf of her family. From an early age, they relied on her a great deal as she was one of the older siblings. Most of her time was spent working on the family farm and going to

school. She grew up with limited educational opportunity and was surrounded by political conflict. Opportunities were especially limited for women and many did not even graduate high school. However, my mother was highly encouraged by my grandfather to continue her education. I asked my grandmother what people said about his decision to let his daughter continue her education and she laughed with a smile on her face. At the time, my grandfather said “I am not the first one and I certainly will not be the last to let my daughters get an education.” Although it was frowned upon, my mother applied to get a college education in the capital city of Prishtina. She was accepted and put at the top of the list to receive an education in literature and Albanian language arts. It was her passion, something she always dreamed of pursuing. When I asked her about it, she said if it was not for her circumstances, she would have done whatever she could to not change her major. However, a new dentistry program opened up and her sister wanted to attend. They had limited economic resources and my mother had to move back to her birth city of Pejë and change her major to financial economics. As she spoke, my heart went out to her. She does not regret helping her family and her sister has since reciprocated in more ways than she can count. She said when you are young you dream a lot. You plan your future, but life always gives you a different path. With age, you realize that you often do not have the opportunities to change everything in your life. Often, it becomes a choice and you choose to change everything or nothing at all.

“Although it is not an inability to bear children that compels men into compensatory creative endeavors, the biology of motherhood does propel many women into devoting a considerable segment of their lives into “creativity” only pertinent within the family” (Gedo, 2000, p. 220). Many highly creative women are encouraged to do well in school, exceed their parents’ plans, but they were and often are discouraged to pursue a career in which children

did/do not come first (Reis, 1995). I asked my mom what she thought about pursuing a career while raising children. She looked at me and said, “There is no greater accomplishment than raising good children. No matter how much you fail at a career you chose, it will never sting as bad as failing your children.” Previously, I asked my brother what my mom would have accomplished if she did not have a family. He replied and said she could have been anything she set her mind to; “she is the kindest most determined woman I know.” With that being said, he continued to say, “I do not think she would have been happy without a family.” When I brought this up to my mom in a later conversation, she wholeheartedly agreed. She stated, “No, I know with 100% clarity I would not have been happy – life is not interesting without children and a family. However, if I had a career, I would dedicate majority of my time to my children and put my career second.” She continued to say that wonderful women can now have both a family and a career and still be able to balance both. I sat back and just listened to her talk as she continued to explain herself further. The following is a statement she made:

“The reason it is so important to make time for your children is because they are your future, not just your future, they are the future of society. The children you raise, in turn affect everyone and everything around you. If you do not make time for them, they will find things to do that are not good for their well-being. Then, their children will do the same and the cycle will continue and it will be very hard to break.”

Next, I asked my grandmother for her input and thoughts on the subject as I thought it was important to hear from the base of my roots. She stated:

“It’s more important to put your children first because work waits, but children don’t, they grow up very fast. In today’s society, people have 2 or 3 children, it’s not a big deal to devote time to them so they can grow up to be good people and have a great

start to adulthood. Waiting too long to have children is also something I would not recommend. This is because you will be very used to your life and not have as much patients to deal with them. It's better to get an education, have a family and raise the kids to school age and then work. The world is different now, you will accomplish more than you ever imagined at a very young age. If you have someone to watch them, it would be a great work and children balance – they grow before your eyes, you won't even see how fast.”

Although my mom was never able to pursuit her dream career, she did a tremendous job being a mother and balancing her work and family. As I reflect, I am very much encouraged to exceed my parents; both my mother and father want me to pursuit a career as well as being able to have children that will come first. It is important to note that neither my mother nor I believe in choosing either a career or children. That is not to say that I will not change my mind in the years to come.

Creative Personality Traits in Women

“Man’s main task in life is to give birth to himself, to become what he potentially is. The most important product of his effort is his own personality.” – Erich Seligmann Fromm

In order for a person to grow and achieve their highest potential, it is important to know what characteristics we embody. I found it especially important for this project to focus in on personality traits of a creative woman. Reflecting on my mother’s life I found it helpful to see what her personality was when she was younger and what it is like now. Also, it was important for my personal growth. Knowing where your strengths and weaknesses lie can do no harm, only good. This is because you can focus on the things you might not be as good at and deliberately fix them.

Despite the lack of studies on the personality traits of creative women, here is some scholarly work that relates to creativity in women. Wallace (1995) used historical analysis of psychological traits and childhood environments in an attempt to identify the early conditions of successful adult females. "Results suggested what is already known; that is, both intelligence and environment were correlates in the success of notable women. As girls, notable women were intelligent, hardworking, imaginative, and strong willed." (Reis, 2002, p.306). I have spent a tremendous amount of time talking to my grandmother and my aunts' about my mother's early life. They have described her as very intelligent, hardworking, imaginative and strong willed, just like Reis's findings. My mom sewed, took care of the vineyard, cooked and everything imaginable. Her work was talked about by all of the women in the surrounding area. They spent a great deal of their life sewing and my mother outdid their work when she was only 12 years old. There was not one thing she put her mind to that she could not do. When I asked, she stated that there was not a passing day she did not wake up with a new idea behind something she had to do. My mother was very determined and worked hard to make that ideas come to fruition. She never stopped envisioning the future and making the best of her present. That is also exactly the way I remember her as I was growing up. She was so diverse in different aspects of her life and I learned to pick up on that. Because of her, I am not afraid to try new things and be successful at the things I try. Her courage and work ethic is remarkable and inspiring.

Helson (1996) compared a sample of highly creative women mathematicians with a sample of other female mathematicians. She found the following traits: rebellious independence, introversion, and a rejection of outside influence, strong symbolic interests and a marked ability to find self-expression and self-gratification in directed research activity; and flexibility, or lack of constriction, both in general attitudes and in mathematical work. My mother has always had a

rebellious independence as she did things “women” in her era did not do. Many women took care of their children and did daily chores, but not many did beyond that like my mother.

My mother could not get a professional job due to the political turmoil while we were growing up, but made the best of the situation she was in. We grew up in a very small town with virtually no opportunities for men, let alone women. She was determined to make a good life for her family and nothing stood in her way. My mother started sewing and selling her items to stores in a nearby city for money. Even though economics was not her passion, it did help her greatly when she started her home business. She was very flexible with her work which allowed her to spend a lot of time with my brother and I. I remember playing with my Barbie as a child and sewing all of her clothes from left over pieces of fabric. I was never discouraged from playing with them or altering their clothing. It gave me a great sense of imagination; my mother never took that away from me. This is just one of many examples of how flexible my mother was and still is. People have given her a lot of advice on how to raise children over the years. My mother has taken all of the advice into consideration, but she never allowed it to influence her and her beliefs. Her rebellious independence stretches over the course of her life.

I asked my mother to write down some similarities and differences between us. She started off writing about how we are both very independent. It is very unlikely that we give up on something or ask for help if it is not absolutely necessary. We always find a way out of a situation and learn to stand on our own two feet. There are many things we have both dreamed and made into reality within our means. My mom stated that her primary focus was always school and that is how I am as well. I know that I could have achieved many things without an education, but I truly believe in the value of it. I never allow myself to be discouraged and look to my mother’s experiences and struggles whenever I feel like I am losing my drive. Another

huge similarity she stated is that we are not very picky when it comes to work. We both like variety in our work and are very enthusiastic and do tasks to the best of our abilities. Both of us are very successful at the new things we try. Last, but not least, we are both very passionate about helping others. Helping someone through a struggle makes us both very happy. It is something that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Some differences between us she stated are especially directed towards helping others. My mother is less patient when someone does not want to help themselves. I am the type of person who tries everything imaginable and then completely gives up. I do not know how to balance my passion for helping others. My mother is more introverted and likes working alone, whereas I am extroverted and like working with people. She also states that I am a lot hastier when it comes to decision-making. On the other hand, my mom is more aware and takes everything into consideration before making a decision. She stated, “My daughter does not have the patience to even be mad at someone and quickly forgives.” It is interesting to note that she knows me better than I know myself at times.

Nurturing and Helping

“I don’t think feminism, as I understand the definition, implies the rejection of maternal values, nurturing children, caring about the men in your life. That is just nonsense to me.” – Hilary Clinton

As women, majority of us have a natural tendency to nurture and help others. It is something that is innate and expressed on a daily basis. I find it especially important for myself as I grow up to not be apologetic about the way I am. Helping others is something I was not only taught, but born with. I believe that women are more nurturing in any role they take on. It is

something that they should not feel they have to hide. Some women believe that the only way to get ahead is by being tough. However, rejecting something natural is rejecting who you are.

A study of 12 eminent Finnish women by Schlosser (2000) found through the women's narratives that they were focused on, "appreciating others, caring for others and being willing to serve others while striving to maintain quality" (p. 86). Keller-Mathers (2004) found that many of the women displayed great desire to nurture and believe in the value of helping others. This gave some of the women great satisfaction and described it as a very important part of their achievements. I believe that it is very important for women to nurture and help. It is in our nature and it seems to be passed down from our mothers. This is also something my mother agrees with. It is especially important because we teach others to follow our lead and learn from our behavior. I asked my mom if it is more important for her to work or help others. She replied and said, "If you have the chance to work, it is more important because you can help others even more. Those who do not work do not even help themselves."

I started to think about this in a deeper sense. My mother has overcome many situations with a creative mindset and a willingness to help others. Whether it was emotionally or financially, she always had a great balance. I asked her how she did this and her reply was that the system can never stay stagnant it has to keep changing. She also said you have to keep open, tolerate ambiguity, and complexity in life. No two situations when asked to assist someone are going to be the same; therefore you always have to be prepared. She continued to say that when you are surrounded in an environment full of potential, you want to do everything in your power to see that person achieve their goals. In that aspect she continued, a person feels good when she or he has been able to help someone. My mother always wanted people around her to feel empowered and know that they can achieve anything they wish. It is very interesting to state that

as I was having this conversation with her, she said that she would never want to see anyone suffer and wished everyone could be on the same level. She continued to say that people have a lot more imagination and potential than they see.

War, the Pain One Can Never Restore

“War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children.”

- *JIMMY CARTER, Nobel Lecture, Dec. 10, 2002*

Everyone in the world has had to endure different anguish in their life. Often, it is these times that make us that much stronger and able to accomplish that much more. My mother's life and my own growth and development as a woman related to the conversation about war has made me realize just how much it has affected my life. However, I am now able to look back and realize just how important it is to think long term, even if you do not think you will live. I have realized that evil people will never triumph, because people like my mother will think about others even if she did not think she was going to live. It had reinforced my belief that there is a lot of good in this world.

I asked my mother to share her experience during the war in Kosova. As a child living such a tragedy, I have made myself forget the haunting images. However, when I allow myself to think about what took place the images appear closer than a 3-D movie and I am overwhelmed with emotions. I asked her what her thoughts are on imagination during wartime and she said there is no imagination beyond survival and the thought of saving your children. She continued to say that all of the material things you once valued and loved become worthless; the only thing you value in a time like that is life.

After many years of built-up political turmoil the war in Kosova officially began in 1998. I remember listening to the news every hour as they reported hundreds of deaths on a daily basis. It did not reach our city until March of 1999, but the fear crept upon everyone as they knew it was coming. I asked my mother how she felt at that time and she said the days were full of sadness and fear as innocent people including women and children were brutally killed. It was horrific, she explained – not only did they die; they died in the most inhumane way imaginable. She continued to tell me how she was unable to see her family for over a year as they lived three hours away near the border of Montenegro. There was no way of getting there as police forces had blocked every road leading to different cities. War had long started in her hometown as they were near the heart of where it all began. Her mind was constantly on her family and wondering if they are still alive.

We lived in a very small town high up in the mountains where my mom spent a lot of time gardening and growing vegetables. She explained that she continued to plant even though she had her doubts of surviving the war and ever eating the vegetables. Still, she said she I thought of the people that will live and how they would survive when the war ends. That year, she planted a surplus of vegetables and canned most of it. I sat back in dismay when she said she did not find her planning and imagination creative. She had listened to war stories from people in Bosnia who were at war prior to us and that is where she gained the idea of pickling vegetables. I remember eating bread and pickled peppers for days, even weeks as it was the only food we had. She explained that she planned for people to come through our town from the city as it was harder for the forces to reach them. As she predicted, we had hundreds of people pass, sleep, eat and live at our house. At one time, we had a family living with us over a month and the food

supply became very scarce. If it was not for my mother thinking ahead, we would all have starved.

I remember the day I turned ten years old, it was April 2, 1999. We were awakened before the break of dawn by the loud noises of bombs going over our house and we hurried to the woods as we had many times before. We stayed all day in the Sharri Mountains and slept in our home at night as the Serbian forces did not come to our town because it was unknown territory for them.

After doing this for weeks, my parents and the rest of the people decided to climb the mountains and cross the border to Macedonia. However, after eight hours of walking on foot through snow and bitter chills, we were greeted with guns. We all sat down and waved a peace flag and they continued to shoot at us. To make matters worse, my brother turned his head slightly and they shot at him. A bullet went through his hair and the women and children started weeping. After a couple of hours of standstill, the shootings stopped and we made our journey back. After about four hours of walking through plain fields, we were being attacked by Serbian forces from the other side. There were bombs flying over our heads and people quickly began to scatter so they did not have a single target. The night crept up once again and we went back to the woods. It was at this time that we were all separated. My mom and I were with a girl that was living with us and my dad was helping carry the elderly and children down the mountain, as they were unable to walk from exhaustion. My mother explained how she had no idea where my brother was and it took hours upon hours for all of us to find each other again. About ten days later, after hiding in the woods, we decided to cross the border through the mountains yet again. About six hours into the hike, we were greeted by people who said to not continue our journey as the Macedonian forces were still protecting the border. At this point my mother explained there

was no hope of survival and everywhere we looked, everything was completely destroyed. A few days later, news came that Macedonia had opened their border, but this time we had to take city roads. We decided to take the risk and embarked on a new journey. Everyone piled into abandoned tractors in order to reach the border as soon as possible. We were driving through scenes you only see in movies. The mothers kept their children's eyes closed.

At one point we came to a stop and I looked up. I saw three men with long white beards pointing their machine guns at us and laughing. The man on the far left had piercing eyes of pure evil; I could literally see the devil in him. This is an image I can never erase from my memory and I shared it with my mother. It was an interesting moment as she remembered exactly what I was talking about. She explained that it was one of the scariest moments of her life because a lot of people knew my dad. He had worked in the township of Sterpce, a town whose majority is Serbian and is very close to our hometown. A lot of Serbians knew my father and would not have hesitated to kill him in cold blood. We drove a few feet from the three men and came to a complete stop. That night we slept on cardboard boxes between the two borders. My mother said it was the best bed she had ever slept in because she knew we were safe.

It was difficult to sleep as bombs and grenades were still going off in Kosova. In the morning we were transferred to the refugee camp Stankovac #1. There we lived with a family of five for six weeks. Summer quickly came and the heat was unbearable. We only had winter clothes as that was all we had left after sharing with others. The living situation at the camp was terrible, but my mother said that did not make a difference. Knowing we were alive and well meant everything. However, she still had no idea if her own mother, father and siblings were alive.

There were many European countries that were taking refugees and that would return them when the war was over. We arrived so late that no European country was accepting anymore war refugees. Our only option was the United States of America. My mother explained that she had always wished to visit, but never desired to leave her home country. However, she saw great opportunity and a happy life for her children. Now, she said I live happily, even though I miss my homeland very much. My parents made the decision to move because they felt my brother and I had witnessed too much already. They also knew our country, which had been torn down, would take years to re-build and they did not want us to endure the pain of after war madness. The rest as they say is history!

Discovering Myself

As I am writing this, I think about who I am and what I have to offer to the world. I have managed to overcome many hardships in my life and stay positive through it all. I truly believe in the power of imagination and creativity. It is something that takes you from point A to the place you want to be. When I started my Master of Science in Creativity program, it was very difficult for me to explain exactly what I was studying. At one point, I asked myself the same question – what is it that I am learning? The answer is I am learning who I am as a creative person and what motivates me to be a change leader.

As I was writing this project, my mother started talking to me and she said I am worried about the fact that you chose to study creativity. I asked her why and she said “your brain will never stop coming up with ideas, it is who you are – I am worried you will be burnt out from it.” My father stepped in and agreed. He said; “I agree with your mom and you will also never stop thinking about what you will do next.” I stood listening for a while and then realized my

grandmother was sitting quietly and listening too. I said, “What do you think about my major, grandma?” She said, “Well, I think it is great because you are more aware of everything. You will always have an open mind and clear vision to know and see things other will not. You are much better suited for a career that allows you to think outside of the box.” She continued to say that creativity reaches far beyond a job that requires you to do the same thing over and over. It allows you to find different paths and do things that have never been done before. She concluded by saying, “either way, people have to always think, do and try different things. You on the other hand have acquired the knowledge to deal with your thoughts and solve problems that lay ahead in a creative manner.”

To me, doing the same thing over and over is completely draining and it is my belief that this routine causes people to forget how to think outside of their daily tasks. My mom said she agrees with my grandma, but it takes all kinds to make the world go around. She told me I have to keep in mind that there are all kinds of people in the world and some are very happy with routine.

I asked my mom if being creative is something I have inherited through my genes. She said, “What you inherit is something you cannot ‘buy’ it has to be passed down. That is not to say one cannot learn to be deliberately creative. It is very important and valuable to be deliberate when using your imagination.” Thinking about my life and the steps I have taken to get to the place I am now, it is obvious that genes played a big role. My days are full of visions and finding ways to make them a reality. Learning from the struggles my mother and my family has endured gives me a greater strength to succeed and fulfill my dreams. I have learned to be more patient and realize that life is a process. It is a process that has to keep shifting and altering as I go through more journeys and obstacles. I have also gained more knowledge and perspective on

being prepared for what the future has to hold. I am not one to stand back and watch things happen, I make them happen.

I believe that success is never accomplished alone; there is always someone or something that helps you to achieve your goals. As I was conversing with my mom, she said success comes when you are surrounded by creative minds. That is where you draw inspiration from and feed off of each other's ideas. People often say, "Oh, look how much he or she has accomplished" and in reality they had many people to help them along. For me, my family and especially my mother are my biggest support system. I am able to think and believe in myself because I draw much inspiration from people around me. The other part is my genes. I have great self-motivation that allows me to be a driving force. I also believe that this project is only the beginning of my self-discovery. Discovering oneself takes time and as life unfolds, you learn things about yourself that you did not previously see or acknowledged were there.

Section Five: Key Learnings

I believe that learning is ongoing and you can never put an end to it. From this particular project, I have learned how powerful genes, surroundings and life experiences are when it comes to the type of person you become. I have also learned that the experiences my mother and I endured are unique. They may inspire others to seek their own creative journey as well despite their current circumstances. Often, we have great imagination because the environment allows for it. Other times, great ideas come from necessity and hardship. One cannot simply stand back when tragedy strikes, you have to think further than you ever imagined.

What I have also learned is that I have not let my hardships get the best of me. I have let them make me stronger and wiser. I have not let anyone influence my decisions about what I am passionate about. Very often people ask me, “What are you going to do with a degree in creativity?” My reply has become, “I am going to be a change leader.” I may not know exactly where my passion is going to take me, but I do know I will make an impact. I have learned that creativity changes generations and with opportunity, each generation does something greater than the previous.

My grandmother watched her mom do things a certain way, she learned from it and improved her abilities. My mother learned from her mother and created her own path. I have learned a great deal from my mother, but I have also created my own path in life. I was never given an ultimatum on what to be when I grew up; I was just told to be good at it. My mother never had the opportunity to pursue a career in literature, but she was good at everything else she put her mind to. This has taught me to be open as nothing in life is a guarantee.

Section Six: Conclusion

In conclusion, no two people you ever meet in life have the same story and background. Everyone has known happiness, sadness, fear, joy, love, hatred, and even horror. What you decide to do with those experiences is what makes you the person you are. Some of us get discouraged, some find great strength in their new found abilities to overcome hardships. Personally, I have gained great strength from my hardships and will stop at nothing to achieve all of my dreams. I also know that if I am going to be a change leader, I will never be apologetic for the things I want and deserve. Each individual in the world deserves to be happy and not live in fear. Our world is constantly filled with people being creative because of necessity. They have to find ways to nourish and provide clothes for themselves. It is such a basic human need and yet we have not found ways to overcome this. It is a deep sadness in my heart that wars exist in the 21st century and when I share my story, most people are in shock. Yes, wars are still happening as I type and yes, we as humans have not found a way to truly help one another.

It is also important for me to state that I do not believe that women are born to fill certain roles. If one decides she wants a family and wants to put her family before her career, she should be unapologetic about it. It is simply a choice. The same goes for a woman who chooses a career over a family. Times have changed since my mother's era and so have views on career and family. As women, we have come a long way since not being able to vote or publicly voice our opinion. We no longer come in a box full of instruction, but change takes time and we sadly have to wait for the rest of the world to catch up. If a woman has the chance or the opportunity she should live according to her preferences. It is my belief that when you start to live for others, you have already died inside. We owe it to ourselves to break down barriers and seek to find our standing as women beyond definition, interpretation and the image of what someone else has

provided for us. I feel very blessed to have had such great influence from the women surrounding me. It is such an honor to be a part of generations of women who have overcome many hardships and remained humble and found happiness in everyday life. I too hope to one day inspire someone as much as my mother has inspired me.

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SECTION 7: APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
PERMISSION

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