

The achievement of desire

Literature



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In the essay: The Achievement of Desire Richard Rodriguez tells the story of his educational career and the impediments that he encountered along the way. Rodriguez begins the essay by titling himself as a “scholarship boy” by saying that he was a student of meager resources within an undereducated family. Rodriguez tells of the shame in his own mind that went along with those circumstances and how it seemed to propel him to even greater heights as a way of distancing himself from his family. Rodriguez tells his story by depending upon emotion, first person narrative and comparison and contrast between himself and his family.

Rodriguez uses first person narrative to his advantage when telling about the expectations of a scholarship boy. Rodriguez says: “he is enormously obedient to the dictates of the world in school, but emotionally still strongly wants to continue as part of the family circle.” Rodriguez tells how a scholarship boy begins his educational journey with great respect and admiration for his family but that once the individual becomes educated and is made aware of the ignorance of his family, the individual will break away from his familial roots in order to distance himself from his past as he sees it as an impediment to his personal growth.

With the aid of first person narrative, Rodriguez is able to make this crucial contrast, which illustrates the emotional separation that took place between himself and his family, and the newfound respect that he had gained for his teachers. When I first read The Achievement of Desire, I was struck at how similar his story was to mine. It brought up a lot of pent up emotions and frustrations that I was able to suppress. There were some minute differences but the friction that was present in my family over my desire to go to college

was present to almost the same degree that it was for Rodriguez and his family.

Rodriguez argues that it is only the boy's intense drive to learn, startling because of his familial background that serves to differentiate him from any other student. When I was in grade school, my parents were involved in my life and thus, cared about how I did in school. But it was my obedience that they seemed to care about more than the marks I received in school. I was never a bad kid but on the few occasions that I did get in trouble, my father came down hard on me and my mother was an emotional wreck because of it. But when I came home with a D or an F in a class that I could have passed, my parents did not seem to care.

As long as I passed to the next grade was consolation enough for them. So when my friends were worried the day we received our report cards and needed to get them signed by our parents, my friends were dreading the time that their parents came home from work but I felt privileged since I knew that my parents would not care. As long as I didn't receive any detentions for bad behavior, I could count on a relatively uneventful night. Once I got to high school, I realized that this treatment by my parents served as more of an impediment to my growth and development academically than I could have imagined.

I began to look around and notice that my classmates who were free from worry on report card day were either very smart and there was no need for worry or they were the “stoners” and “losers” that were not going to go to college and would barely get out of high school. It was then that the friction with my family started. By my sophomore year in high school, when the talk

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of college seemed to monopolize the speech of my friends, I took a long, hard look at my grades and knew that I was not going to be able to get into any college in the country.

I was in the bottom 80% of my class and did not have a 2.0 GPA. If my parents did not encourage educational excellence, they did instill in me a very strong work ethic and that being lazy was a mortal sin. I was put off by this belief because it meant that my parents never expected anything more out of me than an average student with no expectations of going to college. But once I get an idea in my head and know that the conviction to be correct, there is little that anyone can do to shake my resolve.

I cut down my hours at my after school job and stopped watching television on the weekdays. I became as disciplined as I ever was and became wise beyond my years. I knew that I wanted to go to college and that I would have to work extremely hard in order to kick the habit of educational mediocrity that had not only been accepted by my parents but had been encouraged. In this same way, Rodriguez saw his parents as an impediment to his dream of going to college when many college students got there because of their parents. Rodriguez and myself, got to college in spite of our parents.

I cut myself off from my friends who saw educational mediocrity as acceptable and I stayed after school to talk to my teachers and to get extra help then as well as during my lunch break. I ate on the way to my tutoring session with my teachers and no longer believed that everything would be fine in a particular class while at the same time, receiving one F after another. When a new semester started, I requested to be sat up front and did not hesitate to ask questions in the fear that it might be a stupid

question or an insightful question which would invite ridicule and teasing from my friends for “ acting smart and stuck up.”

I wanted to go to college and knew the amount of work that I needed to complete if that were to be possible. The friction that I received from my friends was something that I did not like but could accept. I was never one to follow the crowd or required the validation of people outside my sphere of influence. Now that sphere was replaced by my teachers when it had once been television, my friends and my uneducated family. It was this last group and their disapproval that did hurt the most. It is not as easy to dismiss one's family after they had done so much for you in many different areas.

My father had worked in the mines for 20 years from the age of 15 but when it closed, he secured a factory job at almost half the salary. This was the time that I knew him. When he was bitter and resentful towards the world and that the black spot on his lungs from working in the mines kept him coughing throughout the night. One would think that a father in that situation would want better for his son. But my father seemed very class consciousness and the possibility that his son would easily rise above him with a college education seemed to scare him to death.

His two other sons, my brothers, were content to work in the factory themselves and their existence depended completely upon my father's validation of their work. In *The Achievement of Desire*, Rodriguez tells about how he too received the most friction from his family and that the only way he was going to be successful in obtaining an education was to disassociate himself from his family. It was nearly the same in my situation. In *The*

Achievement of Desire, Rodriguez portrays his father as an ignorant individual who says whatever comes to his head.

Rodriguez offers a sharp contrast as a scholarship boy as he is well-mannered, patient, and full of ideas and thoughts that are properly formed in his head before he verbalizes them. In these examples, Rodriguez shows the reader how the scholarship boy and his father are very different. Rodriguez is more cultured and inquisitive than his father ever was, and the difference leads to friction between the two, as well as the widening differences between the father and son as each seem to drift further and further apart. Once my grades started to steadily improve, this too was the situation between my father and me.

When I came home with my report card and seen on it was my first B in almost five years, I was ecstatic. I wanted the report card to be displayed all around the house and more importantly, validation from my father. Upon showing him the report card, coupled with the change that he had seen in me these past four weeks, the report card seemed to scare him. He had a puzzled look upon his face and then pretended not to care. I was extremely hurt by that, but in hindsight, I should have expected nothing different from him. That report card would not be the last of my improved report cards.

My grades rose exponentially until my name made the honor roll and did not leave until I graduated from high school. 14 times in a row my name was placed on the honor roll and not once did I receive any words of praise from my family. As my cumulative GPA was raised high enough to be considered for college, my father would not allow any talk of college in his house. All the years of fighting had worn both of us down and I knew that I would not be

able to count on him for support of any kind while I was in college; neither financially nor emotionally.

Rodriguez often emphasizes a separation from his parents, as he suggests that " withheld from my mother and father was any mention of what most mattered to me: the extraordinary experience of first-learning" Once I realized that my father was never going to validate my success and that my mother would always submit to his will, I eventually realized that I was going to have to do the same. When my father made a comment about something that was incorrect because of a factual error, I said nothing.

When my final GPA in high school was set at 3. 6, I told my parents nothing but instead let my friends' parents throw a congratulatory party in my honor. And when I received my first college acceptance letter, it hurt me very much to not tell my parents but I knew that telling them and receiving no response would hurt me even more. Rodriguez might have been able to totally disassociate himself from his parents but no matter how hard I tried, I still required acceptance and approval from my parents and specifically my father while at that age.

But as I grew older, that need seemed to diminish a bit and I was able to enjoy my successes in college with my girlfriend who later became my wife. I shall have to be content by the fact that I have received approval from my parents for some of the life decisions that I have made. I have a good deal of positive attributes that I received no where else than from my parents. But sadly, none of them came in the field of education. My father preached self reliance and hard work; two things that were necessary for me to get into

college in the first place. But when applied to the educational field, such qualities did not seem to matter.

But receiving that first B and then receiving A's on my report card was as if it had a strange affect on me; like a drug whose grip on its victim is unshakable. But this was a good drug and it was a feeling that I just had to have. I would be the last to say that I am academically gifted. But any impediments in my IQ were overcome by that drive and desire to succeed and the feelings of adulation that come with it. Sneaking away to read or to learn something new was as important to me as eating and sleeping. Rodriguez shares the same experience in the fact that learning was so important to him and that nothing was going to stop him.