

A Second Chance: Personal Experience related to The Other Wes Moore

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Second chances in life are priceless and is something that should be deeply cherished. As you grow, one's personal experiences shapes your outcome. More importantly the support or lack of support can impact your life in a positive or negative way. After reading the book The Other Wes Moore I began to reflect on my life and the "second chance" that I was given that placed me on a path to a bright future.

It all began in middle school, it had been eight agonizing weeks since I started attending a new school that I was forced to attend due to the overpopulation of ninth graders in my neighborhood schools. I find myself in a daily routine where I'm dropped off to school with tears in eyes, begging my father not to make me go inside. My failure to convince my father on turning the car back around to take me home, forced me to activate plan B, which was an exit plan on how to escape attending a school which I was convinced was an undercover jail for kids. Plan B consisted of entering the office and convincing the secretary at the front desk, to transfer me out of the school. She simply says to me in her eerie high pitched voice "You're new, but once you make friends, you will be happy here". Could this be true? Or is this a tactic to get me out of the office so she can resume working?

Being the new girl in school is hard enough, but trying to fit in presents a greater challenge. You, at times, feel great pressure to the follow the crowd. In doing so I faced a critical situation that changed my life completely. That very day, I was granted what I believed to be a "second chance". "Come on, let's go! It will be great!" was said to me by a student that I considered a friend, her name was Jasmine. The plan was to go to the local supermarket to purchase water balloons so a group of us can have a water-balloon fight. We had free time on our hands because cheerleading practice was cancelled, it was at this time, unknowingly my second

chance was in the making; as my conscious went in to overdrive as in the back of my mind my father's mantra was pounding saying, "if there were ever a situation where practice ended early or was cancelled to call him immediately". That day, my friend's invitation overpower that of my father, and I accepted Jasmine's invitation to participate in the water-balloon fight.

In *The Other Wes Moore*, Wes (the author) had a similar experience when his friend Shea said to him "You wanna tag?" (p. 80) which was a plan to tag their names to walls already covered with graffiti. He felt the compelled to given into peer pressure, as did I. Next, as Jasmine and I walked to the supermarket I explained to her that I did not have any money and she told me "Don't worry about it." As we analyzed which balloons to purchase Jasmine suddenly decided that the water balloon fight didn't seem like a good idea anymore and she requested that we return back to the school to just sit around and talk. I agreed and proceeded to head for the exit. Jasmine trailed behind me.

As we approached the exit things took a drastic turn when a police officer ordered the both of us to follow him. My expression was more startled than a deer caught in headlights. At that very moment I knew that my funeral was soon approaching. There was no story that I could come up with that would be good enough to explain how I ended up at the local supermarket, let alone why an officer wanted to question me. Jasmine and I complied and followed the officer into a room that seemed to have what looked like a million surveillance cameras depicting every corner of the market. He requested from us several times to place whatever we took on the table that was in front of us. We repeatedly denied taking anything. Jasmine did not see frighten, however, I was on the verge of fainting. I recalled when Wes (the author) and Shea got caught by the police for tagging the wall. Wes (the author) said "he had control of my destiny- or at least my immediate fate." (p. 83) I share the same thoughts, standing in that room being questioned on

returning property that I know I didn't have. I was innocent and in a blink of an eye my entire life lies in the hands of this police officer.

Finally, with great frustration in his voice he said "This is the last time I am going to ask you guy to put whatever it was that you took on the table and I am going to give you to the count of 10 or else." When the officer got to the count of eight when Jasmine suddenly reached into her panties and removed a pack of water balloons. I was floored! Words could not express the anger that I felt at that moment. Suddenly everything began to make sense. No wonder she did not have a problem paying for the balloons because all along she knew she would steal the. I now understand why she cancelled the water balloon fight, a strategy to exit the market without standing in line to pay for balloons. I now understood why my father wanted me to call him if I ever ended practice early. He wanted to prevent situations like this.

After the officer turned around and discovered the balloons on the table the words that followed were my saving grace. He said to me "You can go." I immediately sprinted back to the school. That very moment I shared the same sentiments that Wes (the author) felt when he said "I swore I would never get caught in a situation like that again." (p. 84) In contrast to Wes (the author) whom reverted back to tagging a week later after the situation that landed him in the back of a police car, I took a different road. The situation with Jasmine was my turning point, this was my "second chance" I immediately ended my friendship with her and tried my best to apply the instructions that my parents gave me.

After that experience, I could see the great effort that my parents put into trying to prevent my four siblings and I from ending up like all the other teenage boys and girls in my neighborhood. My parents wanted so much more for us. In their country of origin, you had to pay to go to school. My father did not have the opportunity to go to school because it was too

expensive for his family. This was one of the biggest reasons he pushed me to do my best and take advantage of the opportunities presented to me. The family support I received is the reason why my life did not turn out for the worst. My father did not allow us to play with the neighborhood kids. The makeup was either teenage mother or young gang member that dealt drugs. He wasn't content with either one of those choices becoming the reality for any of his children. He was very afraid about the influence that the wrong type of association could have on me. This was the reason why he picked me up from school every day to ensure that I would not end up in a bad situation.

In comparison, Joy the mother of Wes (the author) did all that she could to provide a good environment for her son by sending him to private school and eventually sending him off to military school. Joy's parents also played a major role and provided the support needed to save Wes (the author) by allowing his entire family to move in with them and most importantly financing the expense of military school. His family support and change in his environment is the reason that I believe life turned out differently for him in comparison to the other Wes Moore.

The family support I was granted drastically changed my life as well. For my father to have to have the available time to be present in my life, came with great sacrifice. My mother had to be the breadwinner of the family. She sacrificed herself by working 16 hour days at least four days a week just to make ends meet so my siblings and I could have parental guidance at home every day. The other Wes Moore did not have anyone at home watching over him or providing guidance that would lead him on the right path.

The family support that I was given was beyond the help of my parents just like Wes (the author) but included help from my aunt. She would travel with me to create new experiences and allow me see diversity that existed in the world. She also took me to the library every day and

made me read. She was like a second mother for me. She even enrolled me into a great magnet school which I hated at the time because the school hours were longer than all the other public schools. Eventually, I ended up loving the school and developing a passion for education, something my father wanted for me because he was unable to have the same opportunities.

Reading *The Other Wes Moore* has helped me to appreciate the blessings I was given such as a supportive family and the opportunities represented by education. Through my family's support I was able to escape the pattern that existed for the majority of the teenage girls in my neighborhood.

Today, I reflect back on the "second chance" I was granted and still cannot find words that can truly express the gratitude felt in my heart. As I analyzed the lives of both of the Wes Moore's I conclude that the support received from family and education can put an individual on the course to a future that is bright. This is what I extracted from how life changed for Wes (the author) after the intervention from his mother. I can say the same is true for how this worked in my favor through my family's support and the "second chance" I was given.