I was born on May 14, 1991 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. All of my family from mom and dads side is from this area and I consider myself fortunate for that reason. I have two brothers and two sisters; a supportive father and a sacrificial mother who came up with the notion to homeschool all five of us. I suppose I’m fortunate for that reason as well.

My mom did in fact teach me to read and write, and my older siblings encouraged me to read at a higher level, always. Likewise, I practiced reading to my younger siblings. Seeing how efficiently this system worked, I guess my mom wasn’t totally crazy after all.

While much of my writing began at a young age through letters to my Lowell, Michigan pen pal, it has most strongly been developed through the horse project of the Kalamazoo County Fair. This started at age nine. In order to compete with your horse, each club member was required to research a horse related topic, such as, care and keeping, horse breeds, training techniques, etc. and then present the research through a speech, essays and illustrations, or a poster board presentation. This involvement in the horse science project greatly strengthened my writing and research skills, helping me progress each consecutive year.

I continued with the horse project until age 19, but I had new and different writing experiences with various English teachers during that time. Mrs. Cruise encouraged me to use descriptive detail throughout our creative writing projects, while Mr. Reef sought length of essay with minimal grammar errors; Mrs. Wingle hoped that I would produce a thought-provoking analysis of Shakespeare since I was of course 15 and loved to read plays that I couldn’t understand; not true, actually, and Ms. Straub didn’t assign much writing, just worksheets to go along with the reading. Obviously, not all of my writing experiences have been miserable, but certainly inefficient. I had never before been challenged to express how I really felt or how to develop and express a strong opinion of current issues.

My favorite writing experience was not even connected to an English teacher. Sophomore year of college I attended Kalamazoo Valley Community College to fulfill some general education requirements, and it was there I enrolled in a Child Psychology course which culminated in a research and writing project, similar to the horse projects I had rehearsed many times before. This writing experience was different and intriguing because it forced me to first research many aspects of child development, and second learn and explain how it was relevant to my own life. The finished project consisted of a timeline of my life, explaining how and why I developed the way I did, with illustrations and graphs and research and experiments. What I also love about this project is that I still have it saved in my closet and I have retained all the information so well that I could easily explain everything I learned from that semester.

One of my professors at WMU helped me to write concise analyses and this was also a turning point in my writing career. I have always hated being forced to write a minimum number of pages because sometimes I feel like I have made my point, and it will be ruined if I am expected to fill in the next few paragraphs with gibberish. Ms. Gardner, however, taught me to make my point in even fewer words, with more beautiful words. This was a new challenge, but it was refreshing having an instructor focus on the content and the potential instead of only looking at length.

I want to be the teacher that makes learning meaningful. When learning has a purpose, it no longer has to be a requirement of the students but a desire, and they will continue to learn on the outside of the classroom walls. I want my students to write as many pages as they possibly can, not because page number is of necessity, but because I want their minds to be so full and eager that they won’t have the capacity to accommodate all their thoughts, and will consequently be forced to get everything onto paper.

A stimulated mind is the source of inquiry, and without it, students will continue to go through the motions of school until it is finally over. But then what?