

Journey to the Faculty of Education

Rachel Lobel

In August of 2014, I will be the fifth and final person in my immediate family to be awarded a Bachelor of Education. Despite the fact that teaching clearly runs in my blood, there is no indication from my childhood Language Arts assignments or elsewhere that I actually wanted to be a teacher "when I grew up". My sister and brother followed the straight path to education and are both teachers now but my own journey has been a little bumpier than theirs and one that is likely not completed yet.

Throughout grade school, my strongest subjects were always Sciences and Mathematics. In my earliest memories, I wanted to be a doctor and once I learned the name of the specialty, a pediatrician. At my high school graduation, I won the "Mad Scientist" fun award and subsequently registered for a full first-year science course load for my first semester at university. However, during my first few days at Memorial, seeing the diversity of opportunities available, I quickly descended into an identity moratorium, which essentially led to almost two full years of apathy and irresponsibility. I barely attended class and almost never studied during my whole first year and then in my second year I decided to take some time off.

Thankfully, working at a restaurant full-time did not suit me well and gave me the authentic motivation that I needed to return to my studies. I loved serving then and I still love serving now but I knew that it was not what I wanted to do with my life. I was so eager to go back to school that I ended up taking a few summer courses the semester before what would have been my third year. And though I still didn't know what I wanted to study, I knew that I wanted to study and being back at Memorial felt great.

How I wandered into the Religious Studies department, I'm not overly sure. I was born to a Jewish father and a Christian mother who both converted to the Baha'i Faith when I was about seven. In my preschool years, I took Hebrew classes and throughout the rest of my childhood and adolescence I took part in Baha'i gatherings and celebrations. However, once I was old enough, I opted out of formal religion and honestly gave it very little thought until becoming a Religious Studies student. I think I was just drawn to the intriguing sounding course names and then ended up falling in love with the department's professors. I was not considering career prospects and basically just chose the discipline that I was most interested in at the time.

The next great pivotal moment was shortly after I returned from my birthright trip to Israel, which is an experience provided free of charge to every Jewish young person in the world. The point of these trips is to garner support for the existence of Israel by creating connections to the country amongst young people around the world. At the time I took this trip, I had little knowledge of the conflict that persists there and managed to go the whole month with negligible exposure to Palestine. A few weeks after coming home, I was discussing my experiences with a friend at a party and he casually suggested I get a hold of the graphic novel *Palestine* by Joe Sacco. Eager as I was at the time, I tracked down the book within the week

and soon began reading it diligently. Little did I know that the contents of this book would not only change my way of thinking but significantly alter the path I chose in life.

Upon discovering the Palestinian side of the middle-eastern conflict, I immediately began choosing courses only for the purposes of learning more about the topic. I decided on History for my minor and favored courses on the 20th century; in Religious Studies, most of my courses were on either Judaism or Islam. In this way, I could choose different aspects from the Middle Eastern conflict to write papers on which would help me piece together a greater understanding of the situation. Eventually this passion expanded to include all aspects of global injustice and I developed a strong drive to do something to change the world – but how?

It was Dr. Ranee Panjabi who first planted the seed of using education as a way of instigating social change. Though she did not actually tell us directly to become teachers, she repetitively told us that she made her choice to become a teaching professor so that she could produce young people that were socially aware. In each class that I took with her, she would always finish on the last day by providing us with her home mailing address and telling us to send her postcards telling her of the things we did. She encouraged us to be critical, she encouraged us to be active, and it was during these times that I saw the power teachers actually have to do good.

Although my interest in teaching faded somewhat after finishing my undergraduate degree, it was surely resurrected during my Masters. This degree I completed at Ryerson University in Toronto through an interdisciplinary program on Immigration and Settlement. The choice to explore this topic was again purely out of interest but upon its commencement I knew it was for me. We examined in-depth experiences immigrants have in our country as well as the political choices that cause them. Within the first few weeks, the readings for one of my courses were centered on newcomer children's experiences at school and with that, the rest of my research became narrowed down to not just immigrant and refugee children's experiences in the classroom but also how to teach young children to think from an anti-racist framework.

Coincidentally, another interest of mine was also resurrected during my Masters degree and that was my childhood ambition to become a doctor. I took an elective in Immigration and Health and through guest speakers and an inspirational professor I became taken with the role a doctor can play in peoples' lives. Many of our class visitors worked as health professionals that particularly served refugees and who all had incredibly inspiring stories to tell from their careers. Interestingly, however, it has only been in recent months that I actually made the connection between my childhood aspirations and my current ambitions to pursue Medical School which I believe stems from the fact that they come from very different places. My initial ambition to become a doctor was because I excelled at science; my current desire comes from a developed interest in having a skill that can lead to positive change in peoples' lives.

So how did I end up in the Education faculty at Memorial? The actual reason I am here about to begin my second term in the fast-track program in Primary/Elementary Education is due to my desire to know more about children. It is also to provide me with the certification I

need to embark on a meaningful career if my aspirations to become a medical doctor fall through. This does not mean being a teacher is my second choice, nor that I am simply completing the degree while waiting to get into the medical program. I am actually at this moment genuinely pursuing both professions and am very curious as to what my future self will be doing.