



MY PERSONAL MICHIGAN HERO

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It started when I was four. She was writing on the blackboard in perfect, round, script. I was awed. To others, it seemed like a boring chore. She passed around sheets that had large lines with a dotted line in-between them. On the top were the letters of the alphabet. She went back up to the board and wrote M-I-S-S R-E-B-E-C-C-A. She turned around and smiled at us. "That's my name! Miss Rebecca. This year, we're going to learn penmanship."

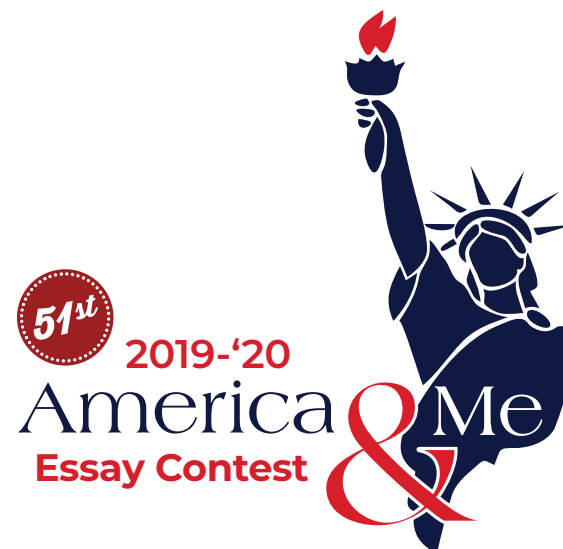
Rebecca Zesgda was my pre-K teacher. She was fun yet demanding and saw potential in all of us in her class. She instilled my love for handwriting. Everyone around me saw it as silly. But every class, I would sit at my tiny desk and work away at the worksheets. They were calming and satisfying, and I liked how the words filled the lines so neatly. Soon, we moved on to cursive. I imagined the letters playing dress up, changing from "normal" to a fabulous princess. From time to time, Miss Rebecca would remind us that having good handwriting meant having good communication. I questioned what she meant then, but nevertheless I kept on practicing. A strange obsession, I knew, but the handwriting felt so real, so alive.

It was different from the texting and emailing the world is so used to today. Texting and emailing is extremely fast, and people can connect easier. But can they really? What could they actually feel from automated letter typed onto a screen? Everything looked uniform yet robotic. There was no personalization in the words I read on my phone. By reading someone's handwriting, you could understand a lot of things. Not just the words, but the way the words slanted, if it were more scribbling than writing, how the letters curved. All of it is unique for ever person. In a way, it shows personality.

I made a promise to myself then as I stared at my phone screen and realized what Miss Rebecca meant all those years ago. Automated messaging lacked the warmth handwriting had, and although I couldn't totally avoid it, I would make an effort to do things

handwritten. I now mail letters to my grandparents. They appreciate the time I take to write to them, and it has helped me connect with them more. Instead of sending quick electronic greetings on holiday to my teachers, I give them handwritten cards. I also replace texting my friends happy birthday decorated by a string of emojis with cards that I slip into their lockers, handwritten and personalized for them.

Every time I write a personal note, I thank Miss Rebecca for all she has done for me. What seemed like a small lesson that day snowballed into a lifelong promise to myself. She helped me to step away from the modern technology and cherish the tradition in handwriting. I have learned to slow down and enjoy the personal communication in today's busy life. Thank you, Miss Rebecca!



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