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Maya’s Message: An Autobiographical Memory

As I sit here, contemplating the summer that changed my life, I can’t help but smile even in this seemingly dire situation. The summer of 2011 was the turning point. All my life I knew things needed to be changed, challenged if you will, and I began with a small group of teachers. Different backgrounds, specialties, and strategies, but one key similarity united us; we all wanted to be better educators for our students and also for our society. You’ll know me only by my first name Maya, and I was the teacher who taught teachers in the summer of 2011.

Teachers whom wanted to improve to be courageous, to be innovative, creative and determined. That summer our group was just that and more. I began that institute, because the realities of our educational, political and social issues were just getting worst. So, I asked myself, am I the only one who cares? Little was I to know that I wasn’t and we saw that on June 20th. We started our day as any other, breakfast, chatting about our weekends, some actually doing course work for their graduate studies. It was a typical Monday; everyone was tired, still trying to wake up. The breakfast helped, it seemed to energize the group; eggs, sandwiches, coffee, and chicken dip at eight in the morning will do that to you.

Then we began our day with a bang, our scribe Sadie woke us up with an acrostic of Thursday’s events. Creativity, passion awoke in all of us. This immediately led the group into the morning chat. As we reminisced about our very different guest speaker, Maria de Mater O’Neil, some participants expressed their take on her research techniques. The phrase they used was “brain dead”, but they also expressed how the unique strategies did work for them. Whether it be a concept map or the photo journal; known to us as our community legacy.

I remember taking a break, then at 10:30 we met again so that Sadie could do her booktalk on Margarita Drago’s autobiography titled “Fragmentos de la memoria: Recuerdos de una experiencia carcelaria (1975 – 1980). Ironic, how that reading was a foreshadowing of my own experience. Throughout the discussion the teachers came to life. Tiredness of both mind and body gave way to passion. A common goal sparked to life among us; we needed to be heard, but how? We continued our day and it was during Emily’s demo that inspired us to express ourselves even more; riddles, poetic fragments with a deep meaning hidden within. The government wouldn’t know what hit them.

We worked hard to get our messages across to not allow fear to paralyze us or for intimidation to weaken our spirit. More ideas came to life from our writing groups, “editorial, experimental, challenge yourselves, try something new, take a risk”. These were the words circling our room, our small corner of the world on the west side of a forgotten island. The result of that summer, teachers educating themselves and others spreading the message of being activists, not only expressing the problems but also, working to solve them; find our voice as a community and being heard.

At last, after that summer, I was caught for educating others. It’s common knowledge that our government doesn’t want critical thinkers; it’s so much harder to control the public fi we all question, analyze, and strive to become better. Better parents, better students, better educators, a better society. So, from here I’m still sending out my message. Be brave, stay determined, be creative and most of all be heard. Write! Write! Write it all! Do not fall into the silent “engaño” our government wants to impose on us. Subtle or drastic a problem, it is still a problem and in June 2011 a select few began looking for ways to address them, the best way we knew how, by writing.

I leave you with this my West islanders; never forget, it all starts with this:

Super heroes’ posses it;

a cowardly dog’s name.

Teachers choose to infect it,

and battle fears flame.

**COURAGE**