

614 words

ONE, ABOVE ALL

The Most Significant Learning Experience of My Life
by Lila McGinnis

Choosing the Most Significant learning experience from a long life of learning experiences is not as simple as it sounds. I picked up a pen and a tablet and sat down to make quick work of it, but kept stopping at the little word “most.”

There was that...and then there was this...and that...but the Most?

Dr. Spock! Surely his book about babies and child care was important for new parents who had college educations but no learning at all about caring for babies; parents blessed with common sense in general but no knowledge in particular. Our families were at least two hours away and long distance calls were reserved for births and deaths, not colic. Good Dr. Spock.

But how about Winston Churchill? His quotation has hung above my desk forever, but when did I really learn the lesson he taught? Of course, the day I took in the mail and opened a letter instead of a rejection slip, a letter which said a check was enclosed for one hundred dollars, and they planned to publish my story.

I immediately counted the rejections listed in my carefully kept notebook, and found that ninety-nine times, for a dozen different stories, editors had said no. And now one editor of a

respected magazine had said yes. I smiled at the card pinned on the bulletin board: NEVER NEVER NEVER GIVE UP: Churchill

A significant learning experience, but was it The Most?

How about—well, when I learned to drive? That sounds ordinary, but when I passed the tests, both the written and the driving, I was sixteen by a day, anxious to drive our family's '36 Chevrolet. Nine years later, after a long war, my husband and I bought our first car. He had made it through school and three years in the navy, sailing about the south Pacific, without learning to drive, so it was indeed significant that I could slide in behind the wheel and take us away.

Maybe not Most significant, however, no matter how proud I felt that day in 1940, the day after my sixteenth birthday.

Perhaps it was being a wife for forty-five years. That was a constant, amazing, and loving learning experience, and during that time there were four children growing up, another amazing learning experience for all of us. But The Most?

Was it learning I could be a good librarian for children, after deciding that I could not be a good teacher for them? Learning what we cannot do well is surely as significant as learning what we can.

Perhaps learning that I could teach adults instead, particularly how to avoid ninety-nine rejection slips, was the most significant? Among them they have already sold fourteen books to well-known publishers. Who knows what they may write next?

I twiddled the pen, read "BIC: on the side of it, looked at the tablet carefully, and then I knew. ONE learning experience above all others shouted at me.

Long long ago, I LEARNED TO READ!

Every learning experience from then on depended upon it. I read to find answers, to laugh, to cry, to look in awe at what words could do: poetry, stories, letters and lists. I passed the written driver's test—I could read! I learned from Dr. Spock and our children grew strong and healthy. I discovered from Little Women that ordinary girls, like Jo, like me, could write stories and books. I could read road signs and directions. I could read my name and yours, the headlines and the news.

Nothing I have learned since equals the importance of this: I CAN READ.