**This I Believe…**

I have learned more lessons in life than I ever learned in a classroom. Experience and education, while very different, go hand in hand because they eventually become one and the same.

I decided in high school that education was not for me, so I quit. For years afterward, my life took a drastic turn into a downward spiral along the ‘sex, drugs and rock & roll’ path of the generations before me. There were many times I contemplated suicide and even made feeble attempts as a way to seek the attention I so desperately longed for. My goal was to escape the world in its entirety. After many years of abuse – at my own hands and the hands of others – my views and goals slowly began to shift.

I’d had enough experience in life. I returned to education. After putting in many grueling hours, I managed to obtain the elusive high school diploma. Shortly thereafter, I entered a local university in the pursuit of a better life. Though not without its struggles, I eventually earned three degrees and was on my way to entering that ‘better life’.

Today, I am lucky enough to teach students who are much like me. Although I have changed drastically over the years, my core beliefs remain. Education is only secondary to experience. Drawing from my past affords me an advantage in communicating the importance of education as an integral life experience.

I believe I am a culmination of my life experiences. I believe that even one slight change in my past would change the person I am proud to be today. I know I cannot change my past, nor do I desire to do so, as my past formed the foundation for my present, and my present the foundation for my future.

I could look back on life with shame, humiliation or anger. Instead, I choose to embrace and hold it close to me. It is my story and one I choose to tell. No one can take my past away from me. No one can change the decisions I made or hard lessons I learned. No one can know me like I know myself. This I believe: I believe in me.