

Eva Holbrook

English 2010 MW

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The Path to Education

The mailbox hinge made a screech of apprehension that echoed the worry in his pounding heart. Would it be there today he wondered. Upon closer inspection, the dark confines of the mailbox did contain a plethora of envelopes. But did it have the one he was looking for? He drew them out with one hand and decided to sort through them on the street, instead of going inside. His wife watched him clandestinely, in anticipation, from the front window of their house. He flipped to the last envelope in the pile, and there it was, the prize of prizes. Like a golden ticket from Willy Wonka, it practically glowed with potential. Finally, the letter from the University of Utah had arrived.

Andrew rushed to the house to share his prize with his wife Eva. He burst through the front door shouting, "It's here! It's here!" Eva was waiting for him at the table, with an anxious smile on her face. He brought the envelope over to the table and set it down. He opened the envelope with trepidation, the letter sighing as it was pulled out. Andrew held his breath as he read the first line, "Congratulations! You have been accepted to the University of Utah for the Fall Semester of 2012."

Eva jumped up from her chair with glee once he told her the news. It was pure elation to know that his dreams were finally going to become a reality. He was going to go to the University of Utah and get a Bachelor's Degree in English, which would lead him to his Master Degree, which would then lead him to becoming a college professor of English.

They were both so ecstatic for this dream to be realized that it took them both a few minutes to calm down and face reality. It was Eva who eventually posed the question, “So, how are we going to pay for this?”

How were they going to pay for the cost of a good education? Both of them were working full-time jobs to pay for their car, their mortgage, and all other bills. Eva was currently attending a local community college to continue her education economically, but it cost a significant amount each semester as well. Andrew had already acquired his Associates degree from the same community college, but needed to attend a University to attain his goals. The prices of classes at a University are significantly higher than at a Community College no matter what. But Andrew didn't want to skimp on his education just to try and save some money at a cheaper University. What were they going to do?

Andrew didn't want to have to turn back on his dream when he was already so close. If only he could get some help or advice on how to move forward. Desperately, he contacted the school to see what advice they could give him. They happened to have a couple of options for him to try. First option was to apply for several scholarships through the school. If that failed, his second option was to go to fafsa.gov and apply for government grants. So that is just what Andrew did. He filled out as many applications for scholarships that he could and he applied for aid from the government.

The application process was difficult and tiring. There were so many qualifications and stipulations for each application that he applied for. He called the school multiple times to ensure he was filling things out correctly, not always getting the clearest of answers. Andrew felt like he was running circles trying to find out what to do.

Finally he finished all the paperwork, only to find out that it would be several weeks (if not months) until he found out whether he would get aid or not.

While he waited, he spoke with school advisors and signed up for all the classes he would need to take the following semester, not knowing whether he would be able to pay for it or not. He and his wife tried to save as much money as possible over the following months in case nothing came through. They discussed the possibility of having family help out, but they both knew that it would not be a realistic expectation because their families were not in a strong financial position to help them. Plus, it was a hard prospect to try and ask for handouts from family that had already done so much for them. All they could do is wait.

At last the letter came, much as it's predecessor did, with high hopes and expectations. And once again Andrew and Eva sat at the kitchen table with trepidation as they opened it. "It is my pleasure to inform you that you have been named a recipient of the Stoddard Transfer Student Honors Stipend at the University of Utah. You are among a select group of students in the state to receive this honor. Congratulations! Your scholarship covers \$1,500 of tuition, \$750 for each, fall and spring semesters of the 2012-13 academic year. Your scholarship is not renewable." At last, a response, some relief. It was disappointing to know that after all that hard work and waiting, it was not going to renew for the next year. It was also disappointing to realize that it was not going to be enough to cover all the costs. But they resigned themselves to the fact that at least it was something.

A little later they found out that they did not qualify for any government grants (apparently they made too much money). But, the government did offer one more option

for those still struggling to pay for school, Subsidized/Unsubsidized loans. It was just enough to get Andrew to move forward academically.

The stress of waiting for options like scholarships, Pell Grants, and government loans was murderous. It adds undue stress to already overstressed students and families. It does not help the family dynamic when children must ask money from their parents (or other relatives) just to go to school. It is especially disheartening when the family has to deny the request due to their own lack of socioeconomic status. Government programs like Pell Grants and Subsidized/Unsubsidized loans are a temporary solution to helping American Citizens gain an education, but there needs to be a more permanent and cost-effective solution to help citizens achieve a better life for themselves and their families.