

The Codes of Perfection

Elise Burk

Email: eburk@keystone.edu Phone: (269)365-3720

Perfectionism has plagued me for 21 years.

I was the first child born in my surrounding family after 4 years and there was a lot of pressure. My two cousins were already the light of their lives but here was I, a big bald little baby, just joining. I was the focus for a while but my siblings soon came after me and my impact seemed to diminish. I tried my best to be noticed but it didn't seem I fit in with my family anymore. My thoughts and interests were so out-of-the-box and I became the black sheep. I now had a lot more things to worry about and with that pushed me towards responsibility and reliability as I made sure to do everything right.

The only memory I can recall of preschool, is of the bright red chair in the corner of the classroom. This corner was drab, no interesting educational posters on the wall, no windows to look out from, in fact there was just ugly carpet and a red chair. This carpet contrasted all the other brightly colored rugs that spanned the rest of the room, yet that chair was always the thing that stood out. I am sure we had been informed about the chair on the first day of school but when you are four years old, information has a tendency to be forgotten. However, naturally as time went by, we all remembered the purpose of that red chair when our peers began being authorized to sit there after they had also forgotten the rules. I don't remember the entire day of the event but I do remember having to sit in that chair. I then vowed not to ever forget the rules, to be orderly, and disciplined.

The chair came up again, this time in middle school, it was blue and had a desktop attachment. This chair was assigned to me next to the most popular kids in class and was almost crucial for a 13 year old me to get through the year. It would squeak every time I sat down, almost shouting to everyone in the quiet room. Not to mention, pre-algebra did not come as easy as math had before. I not only had to battle everyday with the math problems but also the embarrassment of noise coming from the chair. My focus turned to making sure that noise stopped. First by not moving as much then by changing myself. Since then I worked hard to understand those concepts and find myself again. That was the last time I felt good at math but I did learn to be diligent, and how to persevere.

I don't know if the perfectionism started during moments like these or if it was ingrained in me from the start but as I continued to learn about the makeup of life, I have realized that even the foundation of our being isn't perfect.

Biology has always been an interest of mine. It started with the desire to be a vet but throughout school biology always just seemed right to me. I loved creating and producing simple experiments like the classic vinegar volcano and mentos in coke. However as the concepts became more advanced I still felt secure in my ability. Science, specifically biology, seemed like the only thing in my life I could naturally do perfectly. Then I learned about the study of Genetics. Right there in my 7th grade classroom, I learned the details about how we become who we are. The information just clicked but when I reflected on the moment I decided genetics was my calling it seemed superficial. I hadn't even found myself yet how could I already know what I

wanted to do. Yet after multiple years of schooling and furthering my knowledge of the field, it has since provided a sense of self-healing. I have learned that even the thing that has the most important function of making a human being, makes mistakes and that is what makes people different. Sure, big mistakes and not being perfect can have consequences especially when speaking about genes but if we focus too hard on those mistakes are we really taking advantage of our life. This is how I learned not to be perfect but to be flexible and understanding. The tiniest misstep can cause big issues in genetics yet cells still divide and vessels still adapt, they can also mean nothing or be what makes us unique.