

“Okay Isabella, it’s your turn to read. Go to Exodus 20: 1-17. Start from the beginning and speak loudly so everyone in bible study can hear you.”

My shaking hands flipped through the thin pages of my New International Version Kids Bible until I finally found my place. I cleared my throat, took a deep breath, and began reading.

“ ‘And God spoke all these words: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. “You shall have no other gods other than me. “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments’ I...I can’t read this anymore. I don’t believe this. I’ve been forced to memorize, believe and live by these commandments that I don’t even think are true. I’m sorry but I can’t finish reading this daddy.”

My fathers face slowly turned a deep devilish red as the corners of his mouth turned downwards his nostrils flared up in anger, creating a strange contorted expression that certainly couldn’t mean that I was in for a pleasant evening. I ran as fast as I could into my room, locked the door behind me, sat down against the wall, closed my eyes and felt my heart almost pump out of rib cage from the adrenaline rush. Did I really just say that out loud in front of my parents? Not just in front of my parents but in front of my whole church group? To some extent this was a personal victory, and possibly the first moment that I openly stood up for what I thought and didn’t suppress what I believed in. On the other hand I openly disgraced the life that my parents and extended family led, even my own life. Was asserting my belief worth the risk? This moment was pivotal in my life and led me to more and more realizations of what my personal beliefs are and the realization that I must stand by what I believe.

Throughout my adolescent life I’ve noticed that more and more of these moments of truth have presented themselves and helped me begin to understand that there is a separation between what people may tell me what to believe and what I choose to believe. As I’ve become more and more aware of the world around me I’ve started to question the beliefs I once lived by, and even the beliefs that I felt so strongly in a few years ago. I started with a need to know what truth was, is it just a set of propositions that the world gives us to create a false sense of security? What defined truth? Is truth definable? I had so many questions and not much time at all to answer them. When I felt I finally found an answer I would realize it was just another theory, another persons proposition or view on what truth is, I soon realized there is no definite answer, and I could spend years trying to answer that question. After listening to some good advice from a teacher I realized I needed to turn the lens back onto myself and find out what my personal truths are, and what difference I will make once I know. This memoir hopes to summarize what my previous truths were, and how I came to believe them, what I believe now as truth, and how it affects my life today. The purpose of this memoir isn’t to say by any means that these truths are crystallized; in fact it’s quite the opposite. This memoir is to help make sense of how I came to these truths, throughout my years, and to help realize what some of these truths are of mine at age sixteen.

It was a sunny morning on Granite Springs Dr, the street where I would live for the next three years of my life until I would turn thirteen. I groggily walked downstairs to the kitchen to grab some cereal for myself but as soon as I walked into the room I felt the intense stares that were being exchanged between my mother and my step dad. They were arguing again about something miniscule and ultimately of no worth at all but the argument was escalating fast.

Before I could even say anything to stop them they were yelling at the top of their lungs, throwing whatever was within reach and I was in the midst of the chaos unable to stop them. I ran to the pantry and hid for a while until I thought it had gotten a little less intense. They were both back where they were when I had first walked downstairs, at the opposite ends of the table staring at each other intently. I knew that if the slightest move was made by either of them, they'd quickly go right back to fighting. So I tried to walk as cautiously and calmly as I could towards them to try to talk to them to help diffuse the situation. I slowly explained that they could've avoided that whole situation, not to mention could have spared the intense cleaning that will now have to take place if they would have actually listened to each other before they decided to harm each other. They told me that I didn't know what I was talking about and that this was beyond simply listening to each other and that I needed to go back up to my room. I persisted and told them that if they would just try it sometime it would work, but I just got told again to go back to my room. So I went back upstairs hungry and upset because I knew that there had to be a better way to resolve arguments. That moment in my life was critical in my life because when I went back into my room that day I thought long and hard about what had just happened and that even if I couldn't change their minds I could use my knowledge in future situations that I encounter and I can make a change that way. This event triggered my later realization and belief that I live by, peaceful interaction and conversation can effectively solve any conflict if executed correctly. I have believed and practiced this ever since this realization took place and is a very big part of who I am today.

Four years after this event I turned fourteen years old, just then realizing most of the world around me and getting to know myself better than I ever have before, leading me to a very important realization, even more important than the previous. I was then living in a house on Ravenrock Ct., also in San Diego, the last place I would live before I moving to my current home in San Francisco. It was my last day at Rancho Del Rey Middle School, the place where I was exposed to life outside of my conservative Presbyterian school and church upbringing. I finally felt content with life, more content than I had throughout my whole life, in between a difficult divorce, a constantly moving and dysfunctional family, leaving behind the Christian beliefs that my parents held, being shunned by the rest of my extended family, proved to be difficult for me to focus on myself and create a community that I related with. At this point in time at Rancho Del Rey I felt finally that I had just begun to taste what I had yet to fully discover: the creation of a community that I related to and loved. When I got home and slowly lugged my backpack up the stairs to my room after a long day I plopped down on my bed and turned to my sister who was laying face down on her bed, silent. I jumped if from my bed and walked over to her side and asked her what was wrong. She slowly sat up on the side of her bed, eyes red and puffy, still emotionless. After a few moments of silence she looked up at me and said we were moving to San Francisco within weeks. My thoughts were racing and although I knew it was true because of the past suggestions that we might move were brought up, I tried to tell myself that it wouldn't happen. After talking to my mom and having her confirm what my sister had told me I let all of the precautions I would usually take around my actions go and I let go. I cried and tried to make sense of what was happening. My life was disintegrating before me, everything that I had built up was getting torn down and I had no control over it. All my life I was raised to keep my emotions and thoughts to myself but for some reason I decided that suppressing my feelings and thoughts towards my mom could result in an even worse situation than if I tell her. I mustered up the courage to talk to her and express how I felt about leaving everything that mattered to me. In her response she explained to me that it was the best option for her concerning each aspect of

her life and that in the end the pros outweighed the cons. She commended me on expressing how I felt instead of holding my emotions inside even though she could do nothing to change the fact that we had to move again. Even though I wasn't able to stop or change the fact that we had to relocate once again, I was able to express myself in a way that incorporated calmly talking about what issue I had but also feeling strong in the fact that repressing my emotions would be harmful and that speaking my mind and making my voice heard could benefit me greatly in life. After realizing this I made sure that from then on, each time I felt pressured to repress how I would react, think, or speak, I thought back to this instance in time where I realized that my opinion is just as valid as the next person's and always repressing these things isn't healthy. I've brought this belief with me and have exercised my rights to speak freely as much as I can from then forward and if I had not experienced this moment in time I would still now be suppressing every sort of self-opinion I have.

The most recent and most impacting realization has grown from the past two major beliefs but also has been cultivated from each life-changing event and struggle I have encountered throughout my sixteen years. I came to a full realization of this at Oxbow within the months I've spent here, but one particular instance struck me as the defining moment. It was the first week of research for this final project and I was just beginning to read about existentialism and Jean Paul Sartre's belief that one must create meaning for themselves in this life, even if this life may be hypothetically unreal and potentially based off of propositions given by people who were told to make them in order to instill a feeling of security within society. I really started to relate with his theories and the whole existential view on life. And after some brainstorming and concept mapping related to my project, I realized that if there is no set purpose for one in life, one must create a belief that's worth living for. Self realization and enlightenment through taking hold of life's opportunities is the first step, then the realization that although you may feel insignificant within the larger realm and universe ultimately you have the power to do anything you set your mind to, which is a very comforting thought when life throws hurdles at you. I found comfort in the fact that although there may not be a solid definition of what truth is, that you have the power to create truth with the way you choose to live your life. I finally feel like I have the most control and knowledge of myself thanks to this realization and I now feel more prepared to take on more of the hurdles that I know I will face further on in life. If I had not realized this here at Oxbow, I'm not sure if I would have ever, or if I did, it may have only been *part* of this belief and not the *full* belief. I am thankful for being able to have the resources and people around me to help me come to this realization which will ultimately help me lead a more fulfilling life in the long haul.

Throughout all of these experiences and many that were not mentioned in this memoir, I learned some of the most valuable information possible. Oxbow has helped me make sense and analyze these experiences critically and help me challenge my beliefs in order to become a more well rounded individual with a strong sense of self and a better understanding of life and everything comes with it. I will never stop adding to my list of experiences and beliefs, but I will always remind myself of what I have gained by this further self-knowledge and that even if life is, to a certain extent, meaningless, I have the power to make it meaningful. And just knowing this has proven to be one of the best experiences in this universe.