

A Day in the Life of a Nontraditional Student

by

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"Shut up!" With one eye half-open I reached over and smacked the Cyclops howling on the nightstand. It was seven a.m. Ugh. Groaning, I rolled toward the edge of the mattress and, teetering on the brink, flung my feet toward the floor. Gravity and momentum continued the maneuver, pulling me off the bed and to my feet. Yawning, I slapped barefooted into the chilly bathroom.

After facing the mirror for a few minutes with my eyes still closed, I slowly began to realize I was not in bed anymore. Holding my breath, I popped open both eyes and nearly screamed as the light flooded my pupils. The fleeting notion of vampires passed through my mind. After examining my appalling appearance and tasting dragon-strength morning breath, I reached for the normal utensils necessary for me to face the day.

What emerged from the bathroom forty minutes later was quite human and presentable. Only a slight resemblance of that morning creature lingered. But, now I was hungry ... an empty stomach in search of nourishment. However, it had to be fast, as nutritious as possible--and fast. ("Tasty" is a minor requirement at this time of day.) Rummaging through the cupboards I spied a Carnation Instant Breakfast™ and decided it would fill the void in my middle. Pouring milk and mixing in powder was the perfect school day breakfast.

Looking around, I mentally listed what I had to stuff in my bag for the day. Three textbooks, a notebook, my favorite class pen (the one that writes perfectly -- no blobs, no skips, and doesn't bleed through), four differently colored highlighters, a mini-stapler, pocket dictionary and -- what am I forgetting? -- my wallet. I glanced at the clock and saw there was fifteen minutes to get to class; just enough time to stop for the mandatory double-shot tall mocha latte with a hint of mint.

As I followed the path toward the campus building doors, I nodded and waved at half a dozen fellow students. At the entrance, I reached for the left-side double entry door with one partially free hand. Even with the balance of a circus acrobat, another unthinking nod at an oncoming classmate nearly toppled my latte from its perch on top of my stack of books, which were balanced precariously on one knee. Barely escaping catastrophe, I slipped into the building, miraculously keeping everything intact and staying in one piece.

Inside, the classrooms were already filled with chatting students, ranging from eighteen to fifty years of age. I was dwelling somewhere in the middle. Sliding into my usual place, several friends waved and hollered across the room. "How ya holdin up?"

I bent my head in a positive gesture with a slightly harried smile on my face. "Same-o, same-o," I replied. And the instructor walked in.

The lecture had been pretty interesting, so I did not clock-watch (as often happens). However, after three classes, I was ready for a lunch break. Following my usual route around the campus, I arrived at the cafeteria. Ah, my favorite table by the door was available. I made a "beeline" for it and sank gratefully onto the chair. It wasn't long before my table began filling with collegiate sisters weighed down with textbooks and low blood sugar.

The cafeteria was one of the favorite gathering places. More a social spot than an eating outlet, but they did serve those life and energy replenishing espressos (a vital student nutrient!). Conversation flowed, changing directions and subjects more rapidly than a couch potato surfs channels. On this day, the main topic of talk focused on the 1:00 test, and various ways to boost brain function and mentality. Walnuts were the unanimous choice. Someone had read walnuts release a chemical in the brain that allows better retention and sharper focus. (There was a run on walnuts at the local Stop-N-Go.)

Lunch time went quickly, and it was soon time to go take a test. Almost simultaneously, everyone in the room looked up at the huge industrial wall clock. Suddenly, much like roaches when a light clicks on, the room cleared. The only living things remaining were the cafeteria staff and a little plant in the far corner.

I felt ready for the test--sort of. I had studied, read, crammed ... and I had stuffed my pocket with walnuts. Now it was time to sit and focus. Taking a long, deep breath, I picked up my pencil and waited for the papers to be passed my way. In what seemed like slow motion, the test slid across the table surface toward my trembling, waiting hands. Like a perfectly executed pass, it glided on a targeted trajectory and slid under my fingers to rest in exactly the right position. I signed my name and began.

Forty-two minutes, two pencils, and several walnuts later I turned in my completed test. Mopping the perspiration from my brow, I felt great relief. I grabbed my book

bag and assorted stuff, and left the room. Another test behind me ... and so was my school day. My stride gained a bounce, and I had a smile on my face as I headed toward the exit.

I waved, smiled, and joked with those I met along the way. I knew I would be back tomorrow, and take more tests, and visit with new friends, and get ever closer to my degree and my future goals. As I sat at the edge of my bed that evening my life felt "on track." I knew that my decision to further my education in my mid-thirties was good. A whole new world was opening to me, a future filled with exciting possibilities beckoned to me, and it was the road I was supposed to be following. With that thought in my mind, I set my alarm clock, snuggled under the patchwork quilt, and made a mental note to pick up more walnuts.

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