



A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste. – United Negro College Fund, 1972

One thing no one can ever take from you, once you have it, is your education. I believe my father was the first person to teach me this lesson, and he sparked an insatiable appetite for learning in me. I ponder this tenet as a new school year begins for children, teenagers, college freshman, and graduate students.

These days, my knowledge of an inaugural school year is framed by the return of school buses to Beaufort roads, the glut of spiral notebooks, Elmer's glue, and writing implements in the seasonal aisles at Wal-Mart, and kids standing on street corners again in predawn shadows.

I am not quite as disconnected as this may sound. Though I do not endure the heart break of leaving an eighteen year-old son or daughter on the college steps of a new dorm room, decorated in plastic bins filled with clothing, photographs and linens, and trimmed out in iPods, iPads, and iPhones, I am acutely aware of the passing of time as I watch my brother and sister nudge their chicks from the nest – maybe for the first time, or maybe the fifth or sixth time. As parents, they have devoted their lives to strengthening their children for this exact moment of watching them take flight into an unknown world of their own making. My niece's and nephew's pursuit of higher education is anchored in their parents' faith, hope, and love.

I remember donning a red, white, and blue plaid wool uniform for years as I waited for the bus to take me to St. Valentine's School. I disdained my yellowing white blouses with their "Peter Pan"

School Days, School Days

Written by Vivian Bikulege

collars, when just across the street, the public school kids waited for their bus dressed in whatever fashion was hot in the sixties and seventies. My big back-to-school fashion event was shoe shopping. The trade-off between bulky uniforms and bell-bottomed jeans was the education I received from the Sisters of St. Francis of the Providence of God. No matter how disciplined, how mired down I was in rules focused on good behavior, and love of God and country, those nuns and lay teachers delivered by setting me on a solid path of reading, science, geography, history, grammar, and mathematics. The prison garb was incidental.

I went to a public high school. My justification for avoiding an all-girls Catholic academy was that the world wasn't made up of all girls, so why would I go to a high school like that? I played tennis and was a member of the rifle team. I took advanced placement courses in history and English. I went to a few dances, made the honor society, and dated the captain of our football team. I walked to school in the mornings with Eileen Hargrove and Bridget Murtaugh, and in the afternoons, I came home alone after water ballet practice, weighed down with books and a list of impending homework. High school was a four-year adventure through teenage angst, and a platform for my leap into collegiate independence.

This time of year makes me a bit melancholy when I consider the promise of learning minds and wonder what I have done with the chemistry and politics, the marketing and creative writing I studied and where I invested so much time and energy, along with the heavy monetary costs incurred by my parents, my employers, and my own bank account. For many of us, our immediate future lies in the days following another Labor Day, followed by more labor, and outlined in more Monday mornings. But I haven't given up on learning or the dreams of where new discoveries can take me. I will attend a weekend course at the John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina for my first foray into writing fiction, and in September, I plan to attend a writer's conference in Kentucky to learn a little bit more about the art of writing stories. One is never too old to learn, but it isn't exactly the same as those early years of shaping a mind.

Each year a new crop of college graduates is released into the world like Fourth of July fireworks, bright and sparkling, and then suddenly invisible as they meld into society. Every four years, as Americans, we face the renewed hope of presidential leadership that will advance our position as a formidable nation on the global stage of humanity. I can't help but believe that who we are as students, as educators, as graduates, and as employers defines our future roles in world economics, in philosophy and logic, in health and in science. That is why when we fail our youth with the laziness of inadequate education, deny worthy students access to higher learning, or falter in structuring affordable means that enable the development of young minds to enrich our culture, we curtail the future of our country and our Earth.

School Days, School Days

Written by Vivian Bikulege

Whew! I have certainly drifted from big, yellow school buses arriving on neighborhood street corners to the intergalactic travel of world-saving Ph.D. brainiacs!

My humble point – our kids are back in school. Gratefully, many of us return to work after Labor Day. If you are retired, think about volunteering to tutor a child, monitor a lunchroom, or teach English as a second language. If some or none of the above apply, no worries. Maybe the best one can do this fall is take the time to cast an educated vote. I would suggest that among our considerations, we make education a key criterion in choosing a president. It is going to take a lot of smart and savvy people to lead us in this new millennium, and we are off to a rocky start. I know I need to get back to the basics – a budget, good literature, and my writing.

Good luck with your continuing education and your path to a voting decision as you enjoy the cooler days of autumn!

[Read more Whatever](#)