



We All Mess Up

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Gordon Center has been a middle school teacher in Texas for the past fifteen years.

Talk it Out

Although Gordon Center had been a star student in paramedic school, what problems did he face once the situation was real? How could those problems have been avoided?

Name one experience you have read about, or learned about in school, that you have never experienced in real life. How do you think confronting that situation in real life would change things for you?

Read the following quote from President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself — nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

Now discuss:

What do you think President Roosevelt's statement means? Do you agree with it? Use Gordon Center's story to help explain your opinion.

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Write a pretend diary entry that begins: "Dear Diary, Today, during lunch at school, someone started to do something really mean. But I made

everything okay.” Finish the diary entry by describing what happened during that lunch. Be sure to include dialogue, description of setting, and description of emotions.

- Remember a time when you felt scared at school. First describe what happened and how you handled the situation. Next describe how you wish you had handled the situation, and what you would do differently if something similar happened again.
- Write a letter to a younger kid using these two sentences: “When I was your age I was scared of _____. But this is how I overcame my fear.” Keep going from there. Be sure to include dialogue, description of setting, and description of emotions.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY, We All Mess Up

Gordon: When I was going through paramedic school, my instructors decided I was a top-notch student. I'd been perfect in the classroom; and this is in the days of VHS and before reality TV, so they wanted to videotape me to show future students what a really great paramedic student looked like as they went into the field, translating from the book to the mean streets of Houston.

And so we get called out at two in the morning to this little old lady who's having a heart attack. I mean, it's classic heart attack, straight from the textbook: short of breath, gripping her upper extremities, sweat, cool, pale, diaphoretic; she can't catch her breath; you name it. They've got the cameras rolling. I've got it in my mind that--you know, I've never had a form to fill out before; I've got to fill out this paperwork. I'm like, “Oh my God, paperwork? I'm not going to be able to fill this out.”

So there's a videotape of me asking this woman to spell her name for the fourth time. And I'm like, “I'm sorry, Tchaikovsky, T?” and she's going, “C-A,” and I'm like, “I'm sorry, I missed that last one.” And finally you can hear off-camera someone say, “Do you want to give her any drugs?” And I went, “Oh, Mrs. Tchaikovsky (phonetic), we're going to put oxygen on you; we're going start an IV on you; we're going to give you drugs; we're going to turn the monitor on.” Because indeed she was having a heart attack.

And I explain to the kids, when we're frightened, we can't see everything that's going on. And so the trick is, if it's the first time you see something, you don't have any experience with it so you make a lot of wrong choices or choices you haven't thought out. So what I tell the kids is, a la the bullying, “What I want you to do is, I want you to imagine a situation where we're in the locker room and someone is saying something mean to someone else. So let's imagine ourselves in the locker room. We know what it looks like; we know what's going on there; we've all been there. But now you have to picture yourself pushing yourself off the bench and in between the lockers, standing up and walking up and being like, “Dude, that ain't cool. You know, if Mr. Center finds out about it, he's not going to

be okay, I'm just telling you." And I explain to the kids, if you do that enough in your head, by the time that event rolls around, it's the fiftieth time you've done something; and we really don't think about stuff the fiftieth time we do something.

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