

Educational Autobiography of Nicholas Baker

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EDCI 5724 Dr. Hicks & Dr. Bondy

Due Date: 9/10/13

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My name is Nicholas Baker. I was born and raised in Roanoke, VA. I went to public school for a little while and then I was homeschooled up until high school. I went to William Fleming High School in Roanoke, VA and graduated with honors including IB credit. I then decided to attend Virginia Western Community College in Roanoke. After my time at Virginia Western I then transferred to Virginia Tech to earn a bachelor's degree in history in the hope of becoming a high school history teacher someday. After I earned my bachelor's I decided to enroll in Virginia Tech's social science teaching licensure program where I currently am taking classes. My love for history, social sciences, learning, and education in general stretches as far back as when I was being homeschooled.

Since being homeschooled I have always been enamored with the beauty of history and by its ugliness. The first time that I really saw my passion for history blooming is when I was homeschooled by my mother using a program from Baltimore, Maryland called Calvert. The Calvert program focused primarily on the social sciences, math, science, and English. When I was in the Calvert program my first history textbook was *A Child's History of the World* by Virgil M. Hillyer. This book showed me the overall importance of history and how history impacts our lives daily. After reading *A Child's History of the World* I began to read many more historical textbooks and history books in general. I was always enthralled by ancient civilizations. I was fascinated by how ancient civilizations existed and how they functioned day to day for example like the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians. I was always fascinated by

ancient cultures in how they were different from one another and yet alike. When I was homeschooled I started to look at the overall historical narrative and how it penetrated my life at that moment in time and how we as human beings constantly make choices whether good or bad that leads us down sometimes an unknown path. My time being homeschooled was wonderful in that I was able to talk to both my parents at the time about my interest in history and so we developed a discourse between us. My mother was pivotal in that she was a genuine inspiration and she kept my interest alive by helping me develop the necessary educational skills to appreciate history and social studies by teaching me how to read, write, and analyze. I will never forget all of those discussions that we had about history, government, and geography.

During my time as a homeschooler I fell in love with science fiction in general as well. I was always a hardcore trekkie in that I loved watching *Star Trek Voyager*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *The Next Generation*. I tended to tie the way these shows represented a future version of humanity and the problems that they had to endure as a metaphor for human history overall. I began to connect the way humans dealt with alien species on these television shows as a representation of how humans dealt with other humans in the present. I began connecting almost everything to history at this point not just science fiction but essentially life itself.

I will never forget during this time period 9/11 had occurred and I still remember that day very clearly. I was with my mother and we were both watching the news early in the morning while I was doing my school work and she was making a phone call we saw both planes hit the World Trade Center on the *Today Show* on NBC. I will never forget that day ever. At the time I realized that the world had changed in that instant for the United States and that it had impacted each and every person around the world to some degree. This is where I started to make a

personal connection to history and how it affects us as citizens of a country and as members of a world community.

After I was homeschooled I entered into public school by enrolling at William Fleming High School in Roanoke, VA in the fall of 2004. This was one of the most trying times in my life. I was totally shocked by all the different cultural groups that I encountered for example Vietnamese, African, African American, Mexican, and etc. I was so wrapped up into all of the differences and similarities it was really fascinating getting to meet people from all of these different cultural backgrounds and hearing different languages. I had two good friends that were both from Vietnam and both spoke Vietnamese fluently. I eventually asked them if they could teach me a little because I thought it was fascinating. They did but I failed miserably. Even though I disliked my Spanish class due to the difficulty of it I appreciated the cultural aspect of it. I really enjoyed trying to understand the language, history, and the overall culture that was being represented by the class.

At the same time I was going into culture shock I had a hard time at first due to the fact that no one really cared about school at least not in most of my classes. I especially had a hard time in my history classes that I was in. Most of the students seemed to care to a degree but a great majority of them did not care at all. This is when I began to wonder why. Being homeschooled I fell in love with learning, education, and history in general. I always during this time period questioned why students disliked history. I think a large majority of students did not like to be lectured to and they did not like to take a bunch of notes during class. This is where a lot of my teachers in high school failed to a certain degree because they didn't really do many group activities or activities at all. Public school social science was very different from being home schooled because as a homeschooler it was very much learner centered in that you as the

student had the responsibility to learn the material by yourself with some guidance/scaffolding from your teacher or in my case my mother. When I discovered the students hated history in public school this is when I began to start thinking about teaching history. I began to think to myself how I could change this. How could I make my classroom fun and engaging at the same time generating honest interest from students? This was a question that I pondered for a while and still think about to this day at Virginia Tech.

When I was in the 10th grade I decided to do a project on “The Psychology of *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.” I have always been interested in the notion of power and control within societies. I tied the shows philosophy of power and control to essentially government and how governments use power and control on an international, national, state, and local level. During the 10th grade this is when I began to really question and analyze essentially the human condition and why human beings act the way they do both negatively and positively. This is really were I started to make significant connections between history and the things that were happening in my life. In 11th and 12th grade I was starting to take essentially introductory college level classes in history and literature. This is where I began to look at the concept of time more closely and how time continually affects each and every human being.

I graduated William Fleming in the spring of 2008 with IB credit in both history and literature. I decided to eventually go to Virginia Western Community College in order to transfer into Virginia Tech. At Virginia Western I decided to major in liberal arts and human sciences where I began my journey towards being a history teacher. At Virginia Western I took a lot of social science classes from different fields of social science for example psychology, sociology, geography, and art history. One professor that I will never forget taught World History Part 1. I will never forget him in that he basically said that for the longest time he hated history because

of the way that it was taught at the time and so he decided to go back to school to become a history teacher. He decided that he wanted to become a history teacher because he began to realize its importance in his older age and he wanted to teach it in a fun and interesting way that would help motivate and inspire students without falling back on the boring lecture format. I thought that this was really fascinating that he was coming from the same place that I was thinking about during high school and that his goal has become one of my future goals as a history teacher. I graduated from Virginia Western in the spring of 2010 and was accepted into Virginia Tech's history department in the fall of the same year.

I decided to commute back and forth between Roanoke and Virginia Tech because my mother was very ill at the time and needed someone to take care of her the entire day. When I began classes at Tech I fell in love with most of my classes and my passion for history continued to be a source of strength and hope for me especially during this time period when my mother was sick.

During my time as an undergrad at Tech I really began to examine different aspects of history more closely. Instead of learning about an overarching historical time period like US history or World History my studies focused on specific time periods in history. This is when I began to realize the more intricate complexities that history had to offer and the other social sciences.

During my second semester at Tech I decided to take Professor Ekirch's Historical Methods class. This class opened me up to the notion of historical thought or historical inquiry. I began to study essentially the intricate complexities of historiography or the historical narrative as a whole. This class is when I produced one my first twenty page research papers. For the

longest time I had the hardest time coming up with a topic to write and so I decided to write a paper on James McConnell a pilot from the Lafayette Escadrille squadron during World War I. I had my first experience dealing with an actual historical document. I held for the first time actual letters and photographs that were written and taken in France during World War I that were held in the University of Virginia's archive room. This paper inspired me even more to become a history teacher in the sense that Professor Ekirch suggested to me that I should publish it later on in a master's class or in an undergrad journal. I had a similar experience as well in my senior level class on the History of African American Women. In this class I wrote a paper on Nichelle Nichols and how her character on the original *Star Trek* series impacted the Civil Rights Movement.

I decided after I finished my bachelor's in history that I would apply to the graduate program at Virginia Tech for teaching social science in secondary education. I was eventually accepted and started in the spring semester of 2013. Throughout my education career I have looked at history as a source of personal strength for me. I have always wanted to be a social science teacher essentially since the first time I picked up *A Child's History of the World*. I want to become a social studies or history teacher because I genuinely want to help students learn, appreciate, and love history and the social sciences. Most importantly however I want to help them to love learning and education within itself.