The 2022 Me

by Phil Erickson

I wake up feeling refreshed. Smiling in anticipation, I ask my coffee maker to brew two cups. The first cup is ready and waiting for me by the time I’m done with a quick shower. A satisfied grin spreads across my face as I sit down to write.

I’ve asked my students to write a personal narrative about what they’ll be doing in 10 years: on February 8th, 2022. As per usual, I’m doing the assignment alongside my students. In my years of teaching I’ve learned that a great way to demonstrate respect I have for my students and for the work with which I ask them to engage.

By the time I’m done with my first cup of coffee, I’ve got my narrative written. This first draft seems to spill out of me. It always does. It’s never difficult for me to get out the raw shape of what I’m trying to write. This time, I write about the curricular advances I’ve contributed to. I write about how effortless and fun my teaching has become. I write about the respect my students have for me. I write about the realizations and self-discovery to which I have led these future students of mine.

The hard part comes later, when I reevaluate what I’ve written and consider whether or not it accurately and effectively conveys the idea I had going into the project. As I sit and reread the printed out version of my writing, I revel in the feel of the paper. I laugh to myself about how ridiculous the other members of my department (not the mention my students) think I am for clinging to this archaic paper business. These days hardly anyone uses actual paper anymore when writing. After Verizon beat out Apple in the tablet race, most schools were able to purchase iPads on the cheap. Our principal was especially proud. He even considered changing the school’s motto to “A Tablet at Every Table!” That’s one good thing that came out of the digital revolution. Many more kids have an opportunity to use technology. But there’s something satisfying for me in the process of physically crossing things out and moving things around with arrows instead of the instant but somehow hollow feeling of efficiently mitigating this process through my tablet.

After my second cup of coffee is gone, I head to the fitness center. Jogging in the simulator, my mind can’t focus on my podcasts. I find myself reflecting on my writing and how far I’ve come, but how far I still have to go. I suppose writing about my life as a writer in the year 2032 it’s impossible not to think of who I was back in 2012: an excited but scared undergraduate who’d avoided writing whenever possible.

One particular memory comes back to me quite vividly. It was October of 2011 and I was writing an essay about the importance of interaction in teaching ELLs. While I wanted to prepare myself to help my future students, it just wasn’t clicking for me. I remember lots of procrastinating and essentially just going through the motions. I half-heartedly found quotes to plug in once the due date finally got close enough to inspire me to panic. From there I would superficially discuss these quotes until I hit the seven-page mark. Somehow I got a 3.5 on that paper and I remember thinking, “Really? Does he even read these papers?” When I was writing it, though, all I wanted out of the assignment was to be done so I could click submit. After that I could go watch some TV show about zombies or people voting one another off an island or a young woman bent on avenging her wrongly-accused father.

But that was before I had a class of my own; before I grew as a writer through helping my students to grow as writers. Not that I don’t still enjoy shows about zombies now and again.

Back then, though, I didn’t really understand the power words could have. Sure, I was a passionate reader. Still am. But back then I was only a consumer of the written language. Now, as a confident writer, I feel I have a much deeper understanding of the production side of things and can better appreciate the novels I come across. On my way back to my apartment I smile and relish the knowledge that thanks to my writing I have a more developed understanding of what it means to be a human being.