



# Passages Press

## My Path to Learning

by Amanda Thornton

*Amanda Thornton was chosen to be the student speaker at a meeting of members of the Maine Family Literacy Initiative (MEFLI), which is a program of the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. The following is a draft of the speech she will be giving...*

My name is Amanda Thornton and I am twenty one years old. My husband, Shane, is a wonderful man who takes great care of me and our four children. I have three stepsons and one daughter. The twins, Ethan and Dylan, are going to be ten very soon (Ethan's older by twenty something minutes, he let's that be known). Nathan just turned six and is in kindergarten. Mya is both of ours and turns two in May. I love them all. I wouldn't be here right now if it wasn't for their wonderful support and encouragement.

I was in the same school district from second grade up to junior year. It was considered a poor district. Our books were old, along with everything else, but I loved it. What I didn't love, though, was the reading. I wasn't a bad reader; I just had no interest in it. I would only read if I absolutely had to, and I spent a lot of time not having to. I'd ask the students taking the same class if I could just borrow their notes, copy their homework, or if they'd just tell me what happened. It was awful if I couldn't find them the next day or they hadn't gotten a chance to read it either. I'd end up trying to read in study hall before class. When I'd try, I would finish one line, then go to the next, only to find myself reading the same line I'd just

read. I was famous for being able to read a whole page and not remember anything it said.

It wasn't a technical thing. I could read and understand every word. It would happen with books that took up a lot of pages describing every drop of dew on every blade of grass. I remember *Lord of the Flies* was like that. When I did come across a book I liked I made sure I used it for every book report possible. It was easy because I'd get a different English teacher each year! I wasn't a complete fraud - I always re-wrote the reports; I wouldn't keep handing in the same report. I did manage to find some favorite authors like Avi and JK Rowling.

After Shane and I met we moved to a different school district. I went from a laid back school environment to one where everything was taken much more seriously. I found it difficult to keep up with students who'd been educated at a higher level. I was at least six months, maybe a year, behind them and I was too embarrassed to ask for help. When I did get the guts to raise my hand in class I was told to look it up online or at the library. I felt judged. When I approached teachers after class they told me they didn't have time and after a

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while of this I dropped out. After that I tried night school. The teachers meant well, but after teaching all day, they looked tired and had no enthusiasm. It wasn't what I needed and I had transportation problems, anyway. By the time I got married and a baby girl of my own I pretty much had given up on getting my diploma. Everyone told me to get a GED, but with my test anxiety I knew it wasn't going to happen.

When I became pregnant I wanted to make sure I was able to give my kids a great experience growing up, so started reading books on parenting, but I was shocked and disappointed at how my reading never got any better. After I set up a meeting with *Parents Are Teachers Too* I learned of the Passages Program for teenage parents and while it sounded great, I wasn't sure I wanted to go through all that trouble with school again. One day Ethan came home from a bad day at school saying he hated school and there was no point in going. When we tried to tell him otherwise he claimed we were making stuff up, because I never finished school and I wasn't homeless or stupid, so he'd be okay. It hit me like a tidal wave. I knew I had to prove to all my kids that even though I had made a horrible decision to drop out, I recognized it as a mistake. That's when I decided I needed to graduate.

I knew if I was going to do it, I needed a program that could work with me and that was affordable. I needed one that wouldn't penalize me or give me any special treatment because I had a baby, one that would understand what it's like to be a young mother going back to school, a program that would be willing to work at your pace but challenge you at the same time, and most importantly, one that wouldn't take me away from home and my kids every day. I'm so grateful a program like that exists. It's like a second chance in life. I like that assignments are designed to help you set up your life and career, and comes with a teacher that will answer every question and be there to explain even if you call at night. With this kind of support, if you make the effort, there's no way you can't succeed.

I first learned of the Family Literacy Program through Passages' workshops and playgroups. From them I've learned how to bond through reading, music and art. I read a book about how to react to stressful situations, like when my children become upset, and since I've been applying these techniques our home life has become happier and we're enjoying doing more things together as a family. Since I began the Family Literacy program I've been reading to the kids before bed. Sometimes I read them parts of the book I'm reading for school to set a good example. They like that because it shows them I have to do the same things they do.

Recently, one of the twins was upset that he had to read a book and take notes. I told him I had to do the same thing with my *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* book. I dug out my book and showed him how I had to start taking notes after every chapter I read. After he saw how thick the book was his attitude totally changed about his skinny, little one. His even had pictures! I loved being able to inspire him like that. It really is a win-win situation because now that I'm reading to them every day I think I'm actually beginning to love reading!

My daughter Mya loves for me to read to her. She never used to pay attention or look at a page long enough for me to finish it, but now that I've been reading to her regularly she's constantly bringing me books, saying, "Me, too, mama, me too!" After I finish a sentence she'll try to repeat it, at least the last half, and I swear every ten pages we read she learns another word. She's talking a mile a minute now with actual words she learned from her books. I never knew reading to a baby could help them like that.

Passages and the Family Literacy Program is an excellent match. It's given me so much hope for my future. I'm one of the luckiest people in the world right now, because I have the support of so many people who truly want me to succeed as much as I do.

Shane has been so supportive by helping me stay on track and focused, and my kids Ethan, Dylan, Nathan and Mya are my greatest inspiration. My parents are so proud of me for going back to

school and I won't disappoint them this time. I hope to graduate in the next year. Thank you guys, the support you've given me means so much, I love you all from the bottom of me heart; you have all been awesome.

I am so appreciative of Martha Kempe for giving me this second chance for a better life. Janet Larkin, you have helped me so much in the past few months, not just as a teacher, academically, but as a friend. You've given me so much advice about the baby, how to avoid or resolve conflicts with the boys and other people; half the time you just lend an ear, and I just really want you to know that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere without you. Thank you so much. And Mrs. Bush, I am so honored just to be in the same room with you, my husband and I are huge supporters of everything your family has done for our wonderful country over twenty-two years. And I just wanted to thank you very much for this opportunity.

## Hypocrisy

by Anna Martz

Before I was accepted into Passages I was going to a Christian Private School. Their way of teaching was: their way, the Bible, or the two combined. Now hearing that, you might think - ok, that sounds normal. Yet, imagine if it were taught by a group of hypocrites. Every day you were told *you shouldn't date until you are ready to get married. You shouldn't have any kind of physical relationship with a guy/girl. Girls shouldn't work outside the home. A woman's job is to be a stay-at-home mom or a housewife. Don't watch any "worldly" movies or TV shows. Don't go to the movies. Don't listen to any "worldly" music. Don't wear your skirts at the knee and definitely not above. Make sure your blouse is fitting, but not too fitting. Don't stand too close to the guys.* Now if that doesn't make you say, "Wow", this will.

The same people that told us this were ALL women. Every single teacher in that school was a woman. There were two male faculty and they were the basketball coach and volleyball coach. Although

they told us that a woman's job was to be a stay-at-home mom or a housewife, they were all out working. Although they told us not to date until we were ready to get married or not to have any physical relationships, almost all these woman had children before they were married. They go to the movies and own "worldly" movies and "worldly" music. They make you feel awful and publicly humiliate you if you go to those places, own those things, or do those things. If *they* do it, it's ok or simply ignored.

There are a few things that I just cannot stand and hypocrisy is one of them. Going to that school and being told what I could and could not do was horrible, but what was worse was that the people telling you couldn't even listen to what they wanted us to do. I would go to the movies and see my teachers there or see them at the store with "worldly" movies and music in their shopping cart. Some of my teachers were younger and would wear skirts that were definitely "illegal" in the school dress code. And almost every teacher had a tight fitting blouse on. They would publicly lecture us on how to live our lives when they themselves couldn't live like they told us to.

After going through this I have decided that I will not send my son there. I want him to feel like he has choices in life and it's up to him to make the right decisions, rather than have people telling him how he is to live.

## Bonding with Brailey

by Jenifer Bodman

My infant Brailey is a little over two months old and has some very important needs. She needs to be fed whenever she's hungry, which is every couple of hours. So whenever she's hungry, mommy to the rescue! I'm not breastfeeding so I usually make her a four-ounce bottle, but lately as she's been growing, she's been eating more and more. To be safe I've been making her an eight-ounce bottle. After her belly is all full, she needs to be burped to let all the gas out. Most of the time when I'm burping her, her eyes start to get real heavy. She then cries to be comforted and held

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close while she falls asleep. There is nothing more comforting to me and my baby than to be that close. I just sit with her in my arms and rock her as we stare into each other's eyes and feel that special bond. Even then you can't help but stare at her and wonder what she's thinking or dreaming about. You can only wait for her to wake up.

When she wakes up, she usually gives me that look like, "Okay mom, I'm wet, are you going to change me? So I take her into the bedroom and get her cleaned up into a fresh diaper. Which I'll add, doesn't stay fresh for long! You can tell, though, that she feels a lot better once she's changed.

Last but not least, one of the very important needs is to bathe your baby! See, my baby doesn't think it's very important; she actually hates it, but I do it every day! I get out her little pink bath seat and set it in the tub and scrub away while she's screaming. It's all worth it in the end. She gets very relaxed and calms down. You can tell she feels very comfortable. There's nothing better than a clean, fresh smelling baby!



The wonderful thing about being a mom is the bond you and your baby share. From the moment I came home from the hospital my baby and I shared this bond that just keeps getting stronger and stronger as she grows. I remember the day I brought her home, I was so exhausted, so I brought her into bed to lie down with me. When we were lying there

I remember her looking so deep into my eyes, like putting a picture to that voice that she had been hearing. I was doing the same, putting a face to that little body kicking and rolling around in my belly. It was an incredible moment! The doctor and my family said that her looking at me and me looking right back was a great way of bonding for us. They say it makes the baby feel comforted and safe in this new world.

## Interview with Sarah Smith, Professional Quilter

by Sarah Troxel

*What made you start with quilting; what brought you to love it so?*

When I was six years old, a neighbor girl made an apron for my Barbie doll. I was enchanted...how did she do that? I have no idea why she picked me to give the apron to, but I was thrilled. I wanted to be able to make things like that! So I asked my mom, who used to make pants and skirts for me, and she let me learn to sew straight side seams. I took scraps of fabric and felt and made clothes for my trolls (a funky kind of doll...don't know if you have seen them).

Later I came to really like art class, too, although I wasn't very good at it. When I was twenty-nine I found a catalog for Keepsake Quilting, a mail order quilting company in New Hampshire. All of a sudden I realized I could do both things that I loved at the same time – sewing and art!

*Have you gone to a school for quilting or did someone teach you?*

When I found the Keepsake Quilting catalog, I was living in La Paz, Bolivia, at the U.S. Embassy there. I ordered some books, and for the most part taught myself quilting. However, I had been sewing for over 20 years at that point, so I had a good sewing background. In high school I took Sewing for four years, plus had taken Home Ec in sixth grade. Mom taught me a few basics, but she REALLY hated sewing, so I learned a lot on my own.

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As an adult, I taught myself to quilt by reading voraciously. I learned that there were quilting magazines and books, so I subscribed and ordered some of them, reading every page and poring over the photos to "figure out how they did that."



*Birch Pond – by Sarah Ann Smith*

*Has this always been your passion or have you had or ever wanted another profession?*

I've always loved to make things, but my parents told me I had to do something practical and earn a living. So I went to school (college and graduate school) and got a Master's Degree in International Affairs). I loved learning about other places and visiting them and ended up being a US Diplomat (also known as a Foreign Service Officer). I also worked for a US Congressman in Washington, DC as a legislative assistant. It was hard work, long hours, low pay, but I learned a lot and am so glad I got that opportunity.

When I was thirty-six, I had my first son. At that point my husband was forty-six and would be eligible to retire from the US Diplomatic Service in four years because he had over twenty years of federal employment, first as a Peace Corps volunteer, then as Peace Corps staff and finally, as a diplomat. We didn't want to expose our son to the

dangers of living overseas – mostly illnesses in the third world, but also security threats. For example, for a while when we were in Bolivia, a Peruvian diplomat was assassinated literally around the corner from our apartment. Embassy staff was required to travel to and from work in an armored SUV – not a fun environment to raise a kid. So we decided to leave the Foreign Service when Paul reached fifty. By that time I was quilting more and expecting our second son.

We moved to Friday Harbor, Washington, and that is where I met other quilters, went to weekly quilt group get-togethers, and got to quilt a lot and learn even more.

*Do you have employees that help you with the quilts or do you do them all yourself?*

I do all the work myself, not just the quilts, but also all the bookkeeping, paperwork, teaching advertising, writing - everything. Since making and selling quilts doesn't earn you much money, I try to earn more by teaching and writing for magazines. It requires a lot of initiative, drive and hard work. I don't have someone telling me what to do and writing me a paycheck. If I want to get paid, I have to hustle, write editors and ask if they want an article; most of the time they don't, so you spend a lot of time trying to get work, which of course takes time away from the fun stuff – quilting!

*What obstacles, if any, have you had to go through to have your own quilting business?*

It's a lot of work to earn any income in quilting. There are THOUSANDS of quilt teachers and authors out there. You have to work hard and be good and always strive to do better just to get noticed, let alone hired. Sometimes it is exhausting, but I get to do something I love to do and share my passion for quilting. I am very lucky because we pay our major bills with my husband's pension (retirement income), so my quilting income pays for my fabric, thread, machines (when I need a new one...this includes my computer, printer, and business software), books and magazines, and art supplies. Without the work, I wouldn't have the fun stuff needed to make the quilts and art.

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# My Passage Proposal

by Renee Grey

For my Passage I have decided to start a playgroup for young moms to get together with their kids and other young moms. My goal is to make friends and provide a place for young moms to be able to meet others and be able to talk about some of the struggles of the day-to-day life of being a mom.

For advertising I am making flyers to hang up at stores, ice cream shops, laundromats, DHHS, the Children's Museum - any place that mothers go, as well as sending some out to the teachers of the Passages Program to hand out to other students. I am also hoping to put an ad in the *Free Press*. Before I do this I need to find a location to have my first few meetings. I will be contacting a few places I have in mind such as local churches, the Salvation Army, the Rec Center and the YMCA. By the end of March I'd like to know where and when our first meeting will be.

I think one of my hardest challenges will be having to overcome my fear of talking in groups of people I do not know. I plan on just facing my fear head-on by putting myself out there and being myself, and if they like me, good; if not, oh well. There is a quote I like and I am going to try to keep it in my mind while meeting new people in the group to help calm my nerves a little:

"I'm not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you're not here to live up to mine. You do your thing and I will do mine. If we meet, it is beautiful; if not, it can't be helped."

*Author Unknown*

Success for me would be to have people I don't know already actually show up and enjoy themselves. If I don't put myself out there and communicate with people - that would be failure.

For my presentation I am going to show my team members a pictorial journal of my Passage with pictures of the playgroup and my journey trying to accomplish it.

*(Ask your teacher for Renee's contact information)*

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# Baking with Grandma

By Kristina Ott

For my elective I decided to do some holiday cooking with my grandmother. Every year she makes a Swedish bread called a tea ring and I wanted to learn how to make it, so after she passes I can continue the tradition. It was a great experience and I had a lot of fun, but I did have some difficulty in the beginning with keeping the dough from sticking on the counter while I was kneading it, so my grandmother had to help me, but other than that, I did it all on my own. I think I'm going to start helping every year so I get better and better.



Dough:

5-6 cups of flour

2 pkgs. Fleischmann's yeast

2/3 cup warm water

1 cup warm milk

1/2 cup sugar

1 1/2 tsp. salt

1/4 cup softened margarine or shortening

2 eggs

**Spoon...** or pour flour into dry measuring cup. Level off and pour measured flour onto wax paper.

**Sprinkle...** or crumble Fleischmann's yeast into 2/3 cup warm water in large warm bowl. Stir until dissolved.

**Add...** warm milk, sugar, salt, margarine, and eggs.

**Stir in...** 3 cups of remaining flour. Beat vigorously with wooded spoon until smooth (150 strokes). Scrape sides of bowl occasionally.

**Stir in...** 2-3 cups of remaining flour gradually. Use enough flour to make a soft dough, which leaves sides of bowl, adding more if necessary. Turn out onto floured board. Round up into a ball.

**Knead...** 5-10 minutes or until dough is smooth, elastic and no longer sticky.

**Cover...** with plastic wrap, then a towel.

out to be impossible. Mumtaz, the mistress of the Happiness House, made it so that no matter how much you worked, you were always paying her. You had to pay Mumtaz for housing, food, medicine, clothes, makeup, and so many more things. You could leave when she was done with you. That was when you were too old or too sick. So Lakshmi listened and took the advice given to her and started her shameful work. This is a sad book, but it is definitely one you should read.

Patricia McCormick did an amazing job with this book. Her research paid off greatly. This was a well written book that definitely made me understand what it would be like to be in her situation.

## Bastard Out of Carolina

by Dorothy Allison

He violated her. He threatened her. He hit her. He raped her. He put her in the hospital. He was Daddy Glen, and she was Ruth Anne Boatwright - a little girl, also known as Bone, from a little town in South Carolina.

Bastard Out of Carolina is a book that tells about a little girl growing up with her abusive stepfather. He abused her verbally, physically, and sexually. It is one of the most horrifying books I've ever read, but it is one of the best. I'm glad that I read it. The book helped me understand more about the abuse a child can go through and how it affects everyone - family and friends. I recommend this book because it's a powerful, heartbreaking and page-turning story. There were many quotes that I liked, but the following was probably my favorite. They were such strong words for a thirteen year old to say. During this part in the book Bone's mama has just left her to be with Daddy Glen...

"I wasn't old. I would be thirteen in a few weeks. I was already who I was going to be... I was who I was going to be, someone like her, like mama, a Boatwright woman."

# Book Corner



two book reviews by Anna Martz

## Sold

by Patricia McCormick

Sold is a book about a young girl named Lakshmi who is sold into the sex trade. Lakshmi was a normal 13-year-old girl until her stepfather sold her. She was told she would be going to the Happiness House. She thought it would be the house of a rich woman where she would be a maid. She was sadly mistaken. When she arrived she soon found out what the Happiness House was. Terrified and angry, she wanted to leave, but that would not be an option until she paid off her debt. That turned

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