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First high school women's symposium ignites recollections of former career goals

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When I was 5 years old I wanted to be a ballerina. When I was 12 I wanted to be a swimmer. When I was 15 I decided it might be cool to be a professor of English literature, only because I liked the way it sounded.

As I dreamed of one day leaping across a brilliantly lit stage, winning gold at the Olympics and inspiring young minds through the works of Angelou, Hurston, Wharton and Baldwin, I was sitting on my back porch in suburban Philadelphia detailing my aspirations in my journals.

Before I knew what I wanted to be, I think I always knew I wanted to write. Ideas would whirl and swirl in my head until I couldn't stand it anymore. Like a frog leaping from a water lily, stories would leap from my mind, surge through my pen and appear on a blank page.

Everything was a story. Every experience, every dream and every anecdote told to me was re-imagined into a melodrama that only a boy-band-crazed, teen-flick-obsessed, glitter-lovin' adolescent mind could cook up.

My best friend telling me about a cute boy she ran into at the supermarket became a love saga about the one who got away. When my youngest brother was 19 years old he totaled the family's 1999 Toyota Sienna, the only car we owned throughout the majority of my childhood and well into my teenage years, became an epic tale about how one copes with losing a most beloved inanimate object.

In areas of my life where I struggled — math, riding a bike, singing on pitch — telling stories was innate. And now, as I think about the series of events that plopped me in the middle of a newsroom, in which I spend my days telling stories for a living, the whole scenario is ridiculously surreal in the best way.

And what is even more surreal, is having the platform to share that journey with ninth- through 12th-grade female students at Souderton Area High School Nov. 14 during the school's first-ever women's symposium — Young Women Rising: Igniting Our Voices.

The goal of the event is to inform young women about possible career paths while inspiring and encouraging the discovery of new interests, Souderton Area High School Assistant Principal Ellen Sykes, one of the event advisers, explained.

The event, which will occur from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the high school, 625 Lower Road, Franconia, will have approximately 30 female speakers present during three session times, giving students the opportunity to hear the personal stories of at least three professionals during the event. To kick off the event, students will hear from Keynote Speaker Janet Mintzer, who is the president and CEO of Pearl S. Buck International.

“The narrative story is one of the most powerful things we can bring to the students on our campus — stories of women who are successful sharing about how they got to where they are now,” Pathway Development Coordinator and event adviser Cheryle Radcliff said. “We really want to give our students permission not to know everything about their selves, to invest in the learning process and embrace the mistakes made and the learning that comes with it.”

What seems to make this event unique is it has been entirely organized by 11th- and 12th-grade students. From the concept, to garnering many of the speakers, to publicity and creating the event's website, students have been behind it all.

“‘Young Women Rising: Igniting Our Voices’ speaks to how high school is a time to figure yourself out and who you want to be in the world — in your community,” said senior Sydney Kim, 17, a member of the symposium committee.

“It's about discovering who we are,” added fellow committee member Neethu Saji, a 16-year-old junior at the school. “Even though we are young, we are able to speak what we want to and we do have a say in what happens in our lives. This is supposed to be something that is empowering, showing people we can make a change in this world.”

To register and learn more about the Souderton Area High School's “Young Women Rising: Igniting Our Voices” symposium visit <http://sahsyongwomenrising.wix.com/2015>.

URL: <http://www.thereporteronline.com/general-news/20151112/first-high-school-womens-symposium-ignites-recollections-of-former-career-goals>

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