

Christine Bailey
Contest Entry
Penn State Harrisburg
March 14, 2008

Do you have a moment? Then how about two?
For, I have a story—I'll share it with you.
As I enter this contest, I sit back—contemplate...
To determine what it takes to be me at Penn State.

I started my journey about four years ago past,
I came to this campus—I had made it at last!
I was proud of the name and reputation of Penn state,
I was proud to be part of a college so great.

At first I switched majors, I was really confused.
Then I awakened one day knowing just what to do.
I declared Sec Ed English, I wanted to teach.
I could only imagine the lives I would reach.

For, I came from a childhood of abuse and poverty,
I was the only one to go to college in my family.
I faced difficult struggles, impossible odds...
I had only my hope and a prayer to God:

“Please don't let me fail Lord, as I'm sure you can see,
This is exactly what my family expects from me...
As I fight for my children, against no income and loan debt,
No job, no experience, marital problems and bad credit.”

Oh, he answered my prayer, gave me a burning ambition,
I made the Honor's Program and found a job that would pay my tuition,
as a housekeeper at the Medical Center—Penn State,
I worked many long hours and came home very late,
for impossible duties, not enough pay, and a boss who eagerly harassed me each day.

And as fate will have it, my life now a black hole,
I developed an illness, I grew angry and cold.
“Bipolar”, my doctor diagnosed as my case.
One more cross to carry, my life a disgrace...

With medications and anger, grief too great to bear,
I surrendered my life and my family without care.
But the end of my trials was not soon to come;
My boss had determined one more battle won.

He decided to use my misfortune one day,
 As I sat in the auditorium, and he called me by name;
 “Hey Gypsy!” he shouted at me through the crowd.
 Everyone heard him, their laughter was quite loud.

He was referring to the headband I wore in my hair,
 Embarrassed, I smiled and pretended not to care.
 The harassment continued into the third day,
 When two more supervisors decided to say;
 “Hey Gypsy!”—now my nickname, a name I would dread;
 as another boss publicly approached me and told me to remove the “headgear” from my
 head.

They considered my headband a “bandana”, and wearing it was against their policy,
 Not for cancer patients or Muslims, only “Gypsy” girls like me...
 I became a workplace mockery, subject to jokes and scorn,
 Unable to work enduring such distress, my employment was forlorn.

I tried to fight back, but was told much too late,
 that I’d never win a case like this against a giant like Penn State.
 I then concentrated on my education, to finish what I started.
 I tried to remember this was a different Penn State, though I remained brokenhearted.

I returned to my writing and tried to forgive,
 by including my sorrows in an African American slave narrative,
 it was based on a real slave whose life was like mine,
 her pain forgotten within the archives, her history lost in time.

My story had proven an instant success,
 However, there were some who did not “think it best,
 to publish this,” they told me, “You know it’s not right,
 this isn’t your culture, you realize, you’re white.”

Once more I was discouraged, once more contemplated fate,
 Could I really succeed filled with anger and hate?
 Well, I continued to write, I would continue to be heard...
 I decided to fight back with my pen-sword and word.

For, I won’t go away; I’ll never retreat...
 I’ll never submit to discriminating defeat.
 “Diversity”, this word, so often used in our college,
 means acceptance and the learning of cultural knowledge.

However, it now meant a little bit more,
 I now understood something I hadn’t before...
 Diversity meant never insulting or rejecting anyone else,

who may look, think, feel or act differently than ourselves.

There are many forms of discrimination in our society, beware;
Discrimination hurts, is unjustified and unfair.

Which brings me to now—I try to clear my head...
For this contest, I wanted to write something else instead.
But the rules caught my attention and didn't make sense;

“The contest is open to all full time students...”

I wondered about part time students, do we not pay the same rates
for food and tuition and books at Penn State?
I called and received an apology—I knew it must be a mistake,
but I remembered other times I had heard quite the same.

Omissions from scholarships, contests and awards,
I had missed opportunities just like this one before...
I never applied, and now I knew why—
I always skipped over the applications that required full time.

It's unfair, there are reasons why some students are only part time;
yet we're treated as though we've committed a crime.
An example would be our Student Government Constitution,
Read it carefully and you'll notice its biased pollution.

“Full time” students can vote and can run for the Senate
Full time students sign the petitions for all of the candidates.
Yet, part timers are here longer, though you might not realize it yet,
that discrimination happens often—and some of us won't soon forget,

how it seems like credits are valued more than the students...
Well, it may be time to change this flaw and recognize imprudence.
I continue initiating change, I don't blame the institution,
Because it's “We the people...” who are responsible for pollution.

Therefore, I will struggle on, and I will take home the prize,
I'm too damn close to turn back now—and I'm no coward in disguise.
I'll always be proud of Penn State, and you'll never see me cryin'
I'll overcome this challenge too, undefeated by the lion.

I'm one of your best, I'll never leave—I'll continue to be heard,
As I advocate for student rights with my sword-pen and my word.
I am Penn State, and discrimination now, means so much more to me,
than age or color, creed or your ancestral ethnicity.

It means so many other ways of contributing to hate,
Inequality, injustice and the uselessness of this entire debate...
Instead, I focus on possibilities, and our ability to succeed;
I'll help anyone who shows a strong desire to achieve.

And I understand my purpose here—I'll no longer contemplate
the burning question of what it takes to be me at Penn State.