

## Communicating Without Words

Name: Vickie M. Stringer

Instructor: Nancy Pine

Today, the walk home from school was the longest four blocks of my eight-year-old life. I was a third grader at Duffield Elementary located in Detroit, Michigan. My mother, a special education teacher, worked at a nearby school located just four short blocks from my school. The plan and school-day ritual required me to walk to my mother's job after school and wait patiently for us both to drive home together.

The challenge today was the fact that Ms. Carlson had sent me with a note to give to my mother. This also included a copy of an apology letter that I was required to write to her earlier in the day for calling her a *dictator*. I was very upset with her and felt stifled at the "*her way or the hallway*" approach with the class. As a result of voicing my opinion, a stern consequence was the demand: "Little miss busy body," Ms. Carlson said, "You need to write me an apology letter for being so rude!" She then huffed back to her desk, putting on her reading glasses. She squinted her eyes and gave the class a left glance, then a right glance, then a left again *lookie-look*. This was her method to instill fear in the next student that decided to follow my lead.

With trembling fingers, I took the extra thick number 2 pencil between my forefingers and thumb while I stared blankly at the three-lined paper. In the lowest whisper I could muster, I asked myself, "What am I supposed to write?" *I was already in trouble, having had an opinion. Whoever said honesty was the best policy didn't know Ms. Carlson.*

I was raised to always tell the truth; yet having told the truth about the climate of my classroom had landed me in the tiny desk that was placed into the hallway to humiliate and punish those who went against the dictator. "How was I going to get out of this situation?" I whispered again, as if the hallway lockers would answer.

I mastered the art of telling time by watching the school clock slowly click away the seconds, minutes, and hours of each day. I was impatiently waiting for school to end. The fact that I could tell and gauge the essence of time only made this current matter worse, because it signaled the reality that I now only had thirty minutes left to complete her request. "Write me an apology letter for saying what you said," she had said. *Now how would I pull this off? Would having commas, periods, and correct punctuation soften her anger against me?*

I took the pencil and used the best penmanship that I knew to write the words: "*Dear Ms. Carlson, I'm writing this letter of apology to you because I am a child and have no choice. I want to apologize for saying that you were a dictator and I hope that I'm spelling this correctly. I want to say that I'm sorry for stopping class and making you upset with me. I now realize that I have no opinion, just like I have no choice but to write this stupid letter, although, I still totally disagree with you. Because you are older than I am, I will have no choice but to write this letter. I want to say again and again to you. I APOLOGIZE.*" I signed the letter. Ms. Carlson was the teacher that taught me grammar, spelling, and emphasized writing. *Could I make her proud?*

Returning to the classroom, Ms. Carlson's gaze above her black thick-framed reading glasses sent me into a fright. She snatched the note from me, pleased that I had submitted to her will and began to silently read. Yet with the pursing of her lips, the results of my writing told the truth. She was not pleased with the words that I had written. I had tried to get out of trouble with my teacher using the words and vocabulary that I had learned these formative years of my life, but instead, I had sealed my fate. I had learned that with my verbal opinion, "You never let us

talk,” I was impactful, yet with my writing ability - infuriating.

Needless to say, it was a long, emotionally painful walk to my mother’s job. Upon arrival, I handed my mother the note from Ms. Carlson and was perplexed at her reaction. Laughter. My mother found the apology note very well-written, and yes, I had spelled dictator correctly, and all of my punctuation was in place. My mother proudly showed the note to her colleagues, “Look at Vickie’s apology letter to her teacher, isn’t it cute?” In the span of an hour, I had experienced anger, fear, anxiety, and laughter, all as a result of literature. This experience left the most literary impression upon me and it made me realize that with the proper written expressions and punctuation, even as a child, I was ultimately in control of my thoughts, audience, and others. For these aforementioned reasons, I am inspired to become an accomplished, acclaimed, sought-after, newsworthy, educated author and English teacher.