

Carlie Corson- 3rd place

When I was in third grade, my father lost his job. This moment in time serves as a catalyst for my thoughts when I reflect on how finances and money (or a lack thereof) had an effect on my early childhood. I only understood what financial literacy meant once I was well into my high school years. Many high schoolers are able to identify what it means to be financially literate. One must be able to budget, plan for unexpected setbacks, and try to make the most out of their money. However, life has taught me that there is so much more to know. It is hindsight that has instilled in me a deeper appreciation for what it means to be financially literate.

I recall coming home one day and seeing all of the various items that had been in my dad's office now strewn about our living room floor. My parents were sitting at the kitchen table, and they had my sister and I come over in order to attempt to explain the situation. Despite my young age, I do remember grasping the information in a way that suited my young mind. We were sitting on a wooden bench that is not the most comfortable, and my backpack was still on. My dad's expression was tense, and my mom looked scared. She did not seem sure of how she was supposed to talk to us. I could sense that something was wrong, but I had no idea the direction that the conversation was going in. Even once they broke the news to us, I was not able to understand the implications of my father not having a job. All that I really knew was that he was going to be home a lot now, and this was not necessarily a good thing. My dad did not stay unemployed for long. Shortly after he lost his job, he got two new jobs. One was working at a car dealership and the other was delivering pizzas on the weekends. These two jobs combined did not come close to supplying the same funds that the job he lost had, but my family was in a time where every single penny counted. Even with both of my parents tireless working, recovering financially was not going to be an easy road.

I was not aware at the time of all that my family was losing each day. As an elementary school student, I had no true concept of how money functions. I now realize the magnitude of the trouble that we were in the second that my dad was let go. In recent years I have heard both of my parents make comments about how we almost lost our house or how we are still trying to get out of the debt that we were forced into all of those years ago. They say over and over again how lucky we were to have the family support that we do. Neither of my parents are financially illiterate. If they had no concept of how to budget or handle finances, I have no doubt that we would have lost our house or that there would have been nights when I went to bed hungry. The knowledge that they did have translated to us having an emergency fund that we fell back on during this time. The knowledge that they did have is how we were able to not fall to a place that we could not come back from. They may not have mastered the financial world, but they had an adequate amount of knowledge to get by in a sufficient way. My parents' financial struggles were simply a result of circumstances that were out of their control. It was not any lack of financial knowledge that placed them in the hole that they entered. Yet, this understanding of my family's financial struggles has motivated me to never be financially illiterate.

It is important for me to be financially literate because there is no telling what the world is going to throw at me. I have seen firsthand how one setback can cause a chain reaction that leads to uncertainty for an extended amount of time. My family has still not fully recovered from the financial struggles that came with my dad losing his job. I see how stressed my parents become when considering money. I hear the way that they talk about the stress of the cost for both my older sister and me to attend college. While I do not expect financial literacy to eliminate all the stress that comes from dealing with finances, I do believe that being financially literate defines my ideas of what it means to be secure in both finances and life. With more than adequate knowledge of how to budget and maximize the money that I am making, I can be prepared for whatever may come. With the skills of financial literacy under my belt, I will have the confidence to take on the world with little fear of what is to come.