

StoryCorps Interview at the Madison Public Library

Emily Auerbach interviews Char Braxton about pursuing higher education in her 60s, what reading and libraries have meant to Char, and how writing has helped her overcome traumatic memories.

"I felt like a butterfly in that I was free."

Char: I always liked going to libraries. Libraries I found was a way for me to escape, to journey, to learn about different cultures, to dream about going to China -

Emily: And all for free too!

C: Right, absolutely free!

So I went to the library one day. There was a brochure that was in the window and the brochure said something about a journey to college.

E: I think it said 'begin your journey to college for free'.

C: Yes! That's what it said. And right there a lightbulb went inside of me - I can go to college. And that's when I got acquainted with you, Emily!

E: I know you went on after our class to take an English 100 composition course that we now offer to our alumni, and in the act of writing about your past, doing an assignment, you discovered new things about yourself.

C: Yeah, the topic that we were supposed to write about was an object. And right away I thought about a cup of coffee, and how that cup of coffee related to your life and things that were very powerful or personable that happened to you. So I'll read a little bit about what I wrote, just the first paragraph:

"A good cup of coffee brings happiness. Great taste and smells and flashbacks at a time of an ugly incident that required my forgiveness. Coffee is a part of who I am. I drink it daily. And my skin color is caramel salted coffee brown. Each drip of blended water and coffee creates a passionate dance of aromas that are bold, alluring, and intense as you wait to devour your first cup with real Wisconsin dairy cream. That morning, I was the cup of coffee that my stepfather was eyeing with flavour, arousal, and gratification."

E: That really pack a punch, especially because we don't expect that ending with the stepfather. And how did you feel having told a story about sort of something very painful, very destructive in your life?

C: When I was reading it in front of the class, there were tears streaming down my face and there was a release that was going on inside of me. It was also like a new awakening, that this incident did not have power over me anymore.

In the end of the paper I talk about the coffee that I drink now is priceless. Because I knew that in order for me to go forward in life, first of all I had to find forgiveness. And I also had to realize that if I continued to let the incident of rape overpower me, then that I was still brewing in the pot of coffee of the incident that occurred to me - and I had to let go. And I just had to go forward in life.

So it basically was a new beginning, and I felt like a butterfly in that I was free.