I grew up in a trailer park. It wasn’t especially impoverished as I remember it, but it was far from the life I wanted or that my parents wanted for me. I went to public schools, I worked hard, and by the end of my secondary education, I was amongst the top students in my class. I gave the speech at graduation. I was covered with full scholarships and grants to attend a four-year university, studying accounting which I had considered my path because of both aptitude and the career climate I could expect with my degree. I was on a path that went nowhere near a community college and I congratulated myself on that fact. Community college, as I once saw it, was for people who didn’t know what university they wanted to go to. It was for people who couldn’t get into a four-year school. It was a place that was marked by people who were on a road I would never travel. I was eighteen, incredibly sure of the world being how I saw it, and off to start my life hundreds of miles from the hometown I so craved distance from.

One year later, I dropped out. To place the blame on the university wouldn’t be fair, of course. That blame was mine. I didn’t want it. That’s all everything came down to from poor grades I received to the apathy that went into my days in class. I realized after achieving everything I needed to get to the path I believed would make me happy, I discovered how miserable it made me. I hated it. I hated business. I hated math. I hated the idea of spending my next forty years at a desk doing a job I didn’t like doing. I was nineteen, considerably less sure of everything, and I moved back to the hometown I had been so desperate to get away from. I bounced through a few jobs after that. Cashiering for retail stores, nothing that made me particularly happy but it was enough to keep me from sinking while I tried to figure out my life. I
had to work, so university was out. My life crashed to a stand-still and I was stuck between everything I wanted and the few things I could actually have.

It took a few years of being stuck at a stalemate and working on finding out what I wanted, but finally I ended up at age twenty-one working in a preschool as an assistant teacher, and I loved it. I’ve heard people have at times this profound calling to do things. People say god speaks to them or they have some epiphany complete with the universe delivering to them a sign. I’m not sure any of this happened for me. Instead, I just was lucky enough to be hired for a job to which I was well suited and to be put simply, I fell in love. I’m not sure if divine intervention played a part or not, but I am sure that teaching young children is what I am supposed to do. It’s my calling. I found it. I will never do anything else. It was with this in mind that I began to research routes to my teaching license. Most college courses were in classrooms, during weekdays, meaning I would have to buy a car and quit my job. They would have had me going into debt and living week to week all to make ends meet. Most colleges aren’t like Reynolds. Reynolds Community College was, when I enrolled, the only program in the state which offered a full distance learning option to get my associate’s degree in early childhood development. They may still be. It was a no brainer where I wanted to go.

Years before community college had been something I saw as a last option for people who had nowhere else to turn, but that’s never what it was. Community colleges, like Reynolds, aren’t the refuge of those who can’t, they are a life raft to of those who must. It is the great while hope for all of us who need hope. Life is hard, and education is one of the few things that can make it easier. Being certified, being qualified, being equipped to go out into the current job markets and have what you need to get that life you want—it’s invaluable. It’s a struggling
mother having a chance to move from C.N.A. to R.N and astronomically improve her family’s quality of life. It’s a fresh high school graduate able to take his gen-ed requirements without having to worry about the costs before he goes on to transfer for his bachelor’s degree. In my case, it’s a preschool teacher working three jobs across a seven-day week and still being given the privilege to pursue her degree part time, online. The college experience doesn’t just have one face. It has many. Reynolds Community College is reassurance of the fact anyone can achieve higher education if they are willing to work for it. Someday I will be able to get my associate’s degree. I will be able to transfer to JMU and get my bachelors. I will become a licensed early education educator for grades pre-k through three—all of this because of the opportunities afforded me by Reynolds. For me Reynolds Community College was a second chance and I will forever be indescribably grateful for that fact.