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Markala Resby

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Life Span Development

Developmental Autobiography

### **Demographic Information**

I am Markala Catrina Resby, a thirty-one year old single, African American Christian female. I was born March 11, 1982 in Junction City, Kansas. I was born to Hoyt and Juanita Resby, both of African American descent. My father's primary occupational endeavors include both military and security experience; and my mother has always been an early childhood educator. My parents have been married for 35 years and have four children including myself. Although my father is not my sibling's biological father, they all consider him to be a consistent father figure.

I have two sisters and a brother whose ages range from forty-three, forty-two, and forty-one. I am the youngest and due to the disparity in age between my siblings and me, I spent majority of my life raised as an only child. My siblings have both children and grandchildren, in exception to my brother who lives with my parents due to his developmental disability. I have an extremely close and supportive relationship with my siblings, their children, and their grandchildren.

As previously mentioned, both my parents and I are primarily of African American ethnicity. My maternal grandfather was biracial; having an African American father and a Native American mother. Although my mother seemed fond of her Native American bloodline, she has no information regarding her Native American culture. My father has expressed that his grandfather was biracial, with both African American and Caucasian parents. Although my ethnic background extends beyond African American descent, I have no connection to other aspects of my racial make-up.

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My upbringing incorporated strong aspects of religion and spirituality. My earliest memories of my spiritual development were at the age of four, where I would often imitate my church and religious experiences. At age eight, I began to consciously adopt the religious beliefs of my parents. Throughout my middle age and adolescent years, I continued to follow my family of origins' religious values and practices and rarely objected their faith. In emerging adulthood, I began to define my own beliefs which account for my own spiritual experiences and development.

Throughout my life, my family's socioeconomic status has significantly changed. While in the military, my family of origin would have been considered middle-class. My early recollections tell of a nice, spacious family home with moderately expensive possessions. Once my father informally retired from the military, our socioeconomic status changed considerably. Throughout the remaining time in which I lived with my parents, my family lived in either mobile homes or low-income housing. There were times in which my family received governmental assistance by means of food stamps and cash assistance. There were also times in which our housing was unstable, primarily due to relocating for economic advancement. At times, we resided in high crime areas, or areas in which I believe contradicted my internal familial structure. Although we lived in such communities, my parents valued education, spirituality and family structure. My parents now reside in a stable housing community which more accurately reflects similar values of family structure.

### Pictorial Evidence of Demographic Information



The first set of pictures show my mother while pregnant with me; my sister holding me at two months; and my family of origin, minus my sister who is taking the picture. The second set of pictures includes, me along with my parents; and my sister and I being playful.



The above picture is a snapshot of one of the few communities in where my family and I resided; my brother is also pictured to the left.

### **Physical Development**

At birth I weighed 8 lbs  $\frac{3}{4}$  ounces and was 21  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches long. My mother described me as a fairly large baby and stated that although her pregnancy and delivery were normal, she was quite uncomfortable. My growth pattern was pretty consistent throughout all developmental stages, as I was overweight and obese. I began to gain weight at the age of four and was slightly larger and taller than my agemates. Although I was not particularly aware of my weight during early childhood, I do recall feeling inadequate during times of physical activity. I remember being uncomfortable with the game “Musical Chairs,” as I would often bump into my peers causing them to fall. Although they enjoyed the contact, my teachers did not and I was often told to sit out the rest of the game.

There are a few attributions in which I consider to have played a role in my childhood obesity; my family background being one. As aforementioned, there were times in which my family received food assistance; being so, it was important for my parents to shop economically wise and not nutritionally wise, which resulted in high-caloric, high-fat foods. Research has shown that factors including family stress and the propensity of purchasing low-cost, high-fat food, contribute to obesity in childhood (Berk, 2010). Although my parents seem to have made provisions for nutrition by mostly cooking at home, the choice of food was not necessarily the healthiest.

Another contributing factor to my childhood obesity was my culture, as race and income frequently foretell both health and educational outcomes for children (Madsen, Hicks, & Thompson, 2011). Being African American and my family’s lower socioeconomic status both played a role in my childhood obesity as research has shown a relationship between African American children of lower socioeconomic status and childhood obesity (Berk , 2010).

The idea that my mother was overweight also contributed to my childhood obesity as children of overweight parents often become overweight or obese themselves (Berk, 2010). I adopted my mother's eating habits which were pathological and maladaptive. I would experience my mother's negative moods and would witness her eating behaviors in response to her emotional state. Soon after I began the same maladaptive behavior and as research has suggested, I began to respond more to my external stimuli and neglected my internal hunger cues (Berk, 2010).

My weight factor continued throughout my middle childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. In congruency with research, and once being an overweight child, I became an overweight child. Research suggests that overweight children stand a greater likelihood of becoming overweight adults (Berk, 2010). As an overweight adult, I have encountered numerous emotional battles including depression. I have defied studies which suggest the disparity of outcomes for overweight individuals such as graduation rates, job success and cardiovascular disease (Madsen, Hicks, & Thompson, 2011), as I did not suffer academic failure in my childhood, graduated high school, and pursued higher education. Also, although I am aware of stereotyping against my size, I have not experienced much blatant discrimination as suggested by researchers in that obese adults experience discrimination in areas of dating and mate selection, career advancement, financial aid assistance, and apartment rental selection (Berk, 2010). My weight was not the only factor which contributed to my physical development as I also suffered with myopia at the age of five, in which I began to wear glasses to correct the malady.

Even though research suggests that overweight and obese children are less active than their normal-weight counterparts (Berk, 2010), I was quite active as a child. I never seemed to have problems with my gross motor development and fared well in agility, balance, and

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flexibility, which increases in middle childhood (Berk, 2010). I recall playing jump rope games, dodge ball, and kickball in which I played exceptionally well. In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I joined the volleyball team and played until my eighth grade year.

Although my gross motor development, spurred in my middle childhood years, my gross motor development took a slower path in my early childhood years. My parents recall that I did not begin walking until around 16 months due to the fact that my siblings often carried me. My parents also stated that I did not run as normal children, but instead I leaped and skipped. Even though my early childhood gross development took a more delayed trajectory, my gross development remain steady into my adolescent years, as I was a part of my high school marching band as a member of the flag corps team, where I had to rely on continued balance, agility, coordination, and overall physical fitness. My physical activity level would soon plateau as I entered emerging adulthood and early adulthood, as I led a more sedentary lifestyle. Recently, I have begun an exercise regimen which as research suggests, has increased my mental health state, as overall exercise promotes cognitive functioning and psychological well-being (Berk, 2010).

My fine motor development was typical throughout all spans of development. Some developmental tasks in which I achieved at the age of five was learning to tie my shoe and write my entire name. I remember being persistent in learning this tasks and often sought the assistance of my siblings or parents. During middle childhood, I recall struggling with learning to write cursive although I preferred cursive over print because I thought it was “prettier.” I never thought I had particularly nice handwriting and would often practice my writing while at home. I remember my mother gave me a journal for my ninth birthday, to promote my handwriting skills.

Puberty was somewhat of an awkward time for me, as I reached sexual maturation with the onset of menarche at the age of eight. Research suggests that overweight and obese children may reach puberty at earlier ages than normal-weight peers (Berk, 2010). Although I felt particularly uncomfortable, the awkwardness was mainly experienced at school and from the taunts of male peers. My family provided support and a sense of pride as I reached puberty. I remember my mom and my sisters both sharing their “period” experiences with me, which provided a sense of normalcy. Studies show that African American families are more likely to welcome the onset of puberty which accounts for better body image perceptions of adolescent African American females (Berk, 2010).

Adolescence is a time of both physical and mental developments which is accompanied by psychological changes as well (Kiran-Esen, 2012). Although I experienced bullying by male peers, I was often looked up to by my female peers regarding my breast development and my menstrual experiences. Due to my mature look, I always felt as though my teachers expected more from me in terms of my behavior, which resulted in earlier maturation development. Still in early adulthood, people often comment on my maturity, stating I behave older than I appear. Although research states that there is a relationship between early puberty, poor school performance, greater levels of peer pressure, and adjustment concerns (Berk, 2010), I did not share the same experiences, as I obtained academic achievement, was considered a peer leader and adjusted to pubescent development just fine.



### Pictorial Evidence of my Physical Development



The set of pictures on the left shows my height and weight in comparison to my peers. The picture on the left is me in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade where I weighed approximately 230 lbs.



The picture to the left is me at the age of 5 wearing corrected lens for myopia. The picture also depicts my physical stature at this age.

### **Cognitive Development**

My cognitive development was particularly regular throughout my life span development. My mother reported that I began speaking at eight or nine months with one syllable words in addition to “mama/dada.” My parents stated that once my language development began to occur, it was difficult to keep me quiet. My parents stated they often spoke to and with me, enticing conversation. Research in language development states that the degree to which caregivers speak to children is vital in language development (Berk, 2010).

Although my cognitive and language development was typical, there were inconsistencies in my achievement. When I attended kindergarten, I received educational services for higher achievement due to scoring particularly high on the California Achievement assessment. My special services shifted from the promotion of achievement to supplemental and supportive educational services while in the third grade. The extra support must have assisted in my success, since I no longer needed support after the fourth grade.

As previously stated my development was pretty much mainstream and supported by developmental markers such as Piaget’s stages of development. In the sensorimotor stage, my parents reported they supplied me with ample toys to support this stage. I recall viewing pictures in which I was playing with manipulative toys which supported the concept of object permanence. My siblings also spent countless hours playing peek-a-boo with me as well. My parents also stated that I did a lot of imitation. I believe during this period, social learning also played an important role as my older siblings often offered support for more challenging tasks.

As I developed into the preoperational stage my development continued along the similar path of Piaget’s stages of cognitive development. Along with my own recollection, my parents

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reported that I spent endless hours in make-believe play during this stage. I remember having sophisticated real-world symbolization in my make-believe play and would often substitute real objects for representative objects such as turning a chair upside down, while pretending the chair was a car. Sociodramatic play also played a role in my cognitive development during this stage I recall frequently playing “house” with peers. During this play, I would often assign the mother role to myself and other roles to my peers. I believe it was during this stage where the idea of peer relationships became important to me as research suggest that play is a reflection of both cognitive and social skills (Berk, 2010). My parents often kid me that I use to bribe my friends in hopes that they will continue to play with me.

During this stage I also recall using egocentric or private speech. I had no regard to my surroundings and would use private speech to guide my play particularly when working on challenging tasks, as research suggests (Berk, 2010). I remember my siblings interrupting my play or tasks by asking me “who are you talking to?”

As I began to understand language and emergent literacy, I was eager to learn the alphabet and began reading simple books around the age of five. My parents often praised my efforts and encouraged further learning. I can recall memorizing symbols and signs particularly to frequent locations such as the laundry mat and grocery stores.

During the third stage of Piaget’s cognitive development, concrete operational stage, I began to develop some challenges in certain concepts such as reversibility and more advanced conservations. These difficulties would begin to hinder my abilities in mathematics. I did particularly well in other concepts such as elaboration and I began to create relationships with

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concepts and words in order to better recall the information. This was particularly true when learning new vocabulary or spelling words.

During this period I also began to understand metacognition and understanding how I best learn. It was not until I was scolded by my parents after doing poorly on assignments that I began to assess my learning strategies. I began to understand that I must focus in terms of studying, in order to do well on assignments, especially in math and social studies. It was during this period that I began to feel pressure from my parents and peers as we would often compare grades received on assignments.

In the final stage of Piaget's cognitive development, formal operational, I continued to develop my metacognition and academic self-regulation. As in the previous stage I began to experience pressure from both peers and parents. This pressure often led to me reassessing what was or was not working in terms of my academic achievement. Research states that adolescents combine and interpret information received from peer and social groups, as cognition matures and perception expands (Kiran-Esen, 2012). Despite my developing academic self-regulation, my knowledge of what was needed to maintain academic success was often contradicted with emerging cognitive distortions such as imaginary audiences. I remember obtaining my only failing grade in high school, after completing my Spanish course. The course required participation and I was particularly self-conscious in my freshman year of high school.

During this period, my decision-making skills also emerged and developed. My peer relationships greatly impacted my choices. Although I was succeeding exceptionally well considering factors which would suggest poorer academic success (i.e., obesity, lower SES, early sexual maturation), I still grappled with career choices and considered attending a local technical

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college. My peers pressured me to take the SAT, apply for and attend the same college in which they had chosen. Thankfully, in this regard, I fell into the pressure of my peers and began my process of obtaining higher education at Georgia Southern University instead of Athens Technical College. Research suggests that peers play a strong role in molding life choices and transitions from adolescence into adulthood (Kiran-Esen, 2012).

My peer relationships played an important role in where I am currently in terms of my academic process. Although I am the only individual out of my peer group who has gone on to pursue a graduate degree, my supportive relationships with both my family and my peers has played a role in my continuation of my master's degree, even when life presented challenges. My cognition continues to develop in my graduate experience, as my metacognition deepens. I now try to understand why I do certain learning strategies and try to sharpen those strategies. I have also witnessed a change in my relativistic thinking, in that I no longer accept the word of educators or colleagues as absolute truth, but learn to develop research strategies which examine the ideas and concepts presented to me.

### Pictorial Evidence of Cognitive Development



The above pictures show my early experiences in the preoperational stage. The picture on the left shows me finger painting while at school. The picture on the right shows me in make-believe play with my favorite doll Jennie.

Subject	1	2	3	4	5
<b>READING</b> Reads and writes Understands what is read Knows sounds in vocabulary Understands paragraphs Reads on grade level Completes assignments Performs well on tests					
<i>Reading Book</i>					
<i>Landscape</i>					
<b>MATHEMATICS</b> Knows and uses facts - facts Knows and uses a 100 chart Knows fractions Reasons on number sense Wordy word problems Completes assignments Performs well on tests					
<b>SPELLING</b> Learns assigned words Spells well in written work Completes assignments					
<b>ENGLISH</b> Can express thoughts orally Can express thoughts in writing Learns language rules Applies skills in written expressions Completes assignments Performs well on tests					
<b>HANDWRITING</b> Writes letters and numbers correctly Writes legibly in daily work					
<b>SOCIAL STUDIES</b> Learns concepts and facts					
<b>ART</b> Can draw pictures					
<b>MUSIC</b> Knows notes or rests Participates in activities Understands directions Contributes to discussions					
<b>WORK SKILLS/HABITS</b> Completes assignments Keeps work neat and orderly Learns time orally Works independently Learns carefully Follows directions Contributes to discussions					
<b>CONDUCT</b> Respects authority Accepts responsibility for actions Problems self-responsible Gets along with other children Accepts direction Takes care of school and personal property					
<b>ATTENDANCE</b> Days present Days absent Times tardy Absences/tardies hindered progress Mark with an 'X' if applicable					
<b>COMMENTS:</b> 1st Period - Conference 2nd Period					

The picture to above shows my 5<sup>th</sup> grade academic report card.

### **Social Personality Development**

My parents interactions have shaped the person I am today. My parents recall that they supported my independence within respectful boundaries. My parents often nostalgically retell stories in which they considered me to be “bossy.” Although I have shaped my personality from childhood (i.e., becoming less “bossy” and more assertive), I attribute most of personality development to my family of origin and the environment in which they created, and to less manipulative social environments such as school.

Majority of my emotional development was positive, in which I resolved majority of Erickson’s psychosocial stage. In the first stage, basic trust vs. mistrust, my parents created in environment of trust, which supported my exploration of my environment. My parents stated that at times I was too explorative and would often get into things in which I had no business exploring.

In the next stage, autonomy vs. shame and doubt, my parents provided opportunities to promote my self-confidence but were at time stern and unreasonable in regards to toileting. I do not think I completely resolved this stage as at times, I am dependent upon my parents (particularly my mother) when making decisions. There were times in which my mother had a “do it now, as I say” behavioral method, which created dependency. Even now in early adulthood, I seek my mother’s approval of major life choices. This unresolved characteristic of this stage is in agreement with research that suggests that when parents are over and under controlling, children tend to doubt their ability to control impulses and to behave competently (Berk, 2010).

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In Erickson's initiative vs. guilt stage, I recall engaging in a lot of play activities which allowed me to try out newer skills without criticism (Berk, 2010). My parents encouraged play and often praised my creativity. There were times however, when my strides toward independence caused me to be reprimanded which created feelings of guilt and wrongdoing. My parents did however support my self-esteem by offering praise for new tasks such as learning how to read or learning all my spelling words.

In industry vs. inferiority, although my parents created reasonable expectations in developing and acquiring new tasks, my social environments did not always support my self-esteem, as I often received criticism on certain tasks. I now attribute most of the criticism to the stereotypes associated with my weight. My parents supported my readiness of this stage by promoting my music abilities. I remember my parents registered me for an advanced summer music program, in which I was in with students who were two grades above me. My parents offered support and encouraged me to complete the program despite my constant request to quit.

In the next stage of psychosocial development, identify vs. role confusion, my parents supported this stage by encouraging me to participate in a vocational exploration program called Medical Explorers, since I desired a career in the medical field. This exploration allowed further investigation into career choices and to consider personality traits in regards to occupational careers.

In the final psychosocial stage in which I am currently in, intimacy vs. isolation, I continue to grapple with the decision of making permanent commitments, such as marriage and parenthood and the potential loss of my independence while making these commitments. There is a sudden urgency to resolve this stage as I age. I find myself pressured by both the social and



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the proverbial biological clocks. I find myself comparing my accomplishments to those of my peers. I also feel social pressure from my family and parents in regards to marriage and children.

Although I feel social pressures to attain certain career and personal objectives, I also place pressure on myself in terms of selecting a mate. I struggle with the idea of remaining lonely while exerting my independence. Research suggests that loneliness can promote self-awareness (Berk, 2010). During this period of singlehood, I rely on the support of my peers and family and I continue self-reflection to gain better insight of myself.

Overall I contribute my emotional development to the secure attachment formed with my parents as an infant. Because of those secure attachments, I seek relationships which provide support, trust, and genuine love (Berk, 2010). Because my parents matched their discipline techniques with my temperament, creating a goodness-to-fit environment, I was able to successfully resolve many psychosocial issues associated with emotional development. I believe the development of my temperament supported by my parents, provided opportunities to develop a resilient personality, which combated many of my social implications such as my parents' socioeconomic status and my emotional battles with my weight. As suggested in research, personality is developed through temperament and experiences (Rothbart, 2007). The environment in which my parents created helped to mediate the relationship between socioeconomic factors, in which parenting behaviors have been found to do (Tucker-Drob & Harden, 2012).

### **Moral Development**

Much of my moral development centered on my relationships and interactions with my peers and my immediate social influences. In my early childhood development, my morality was

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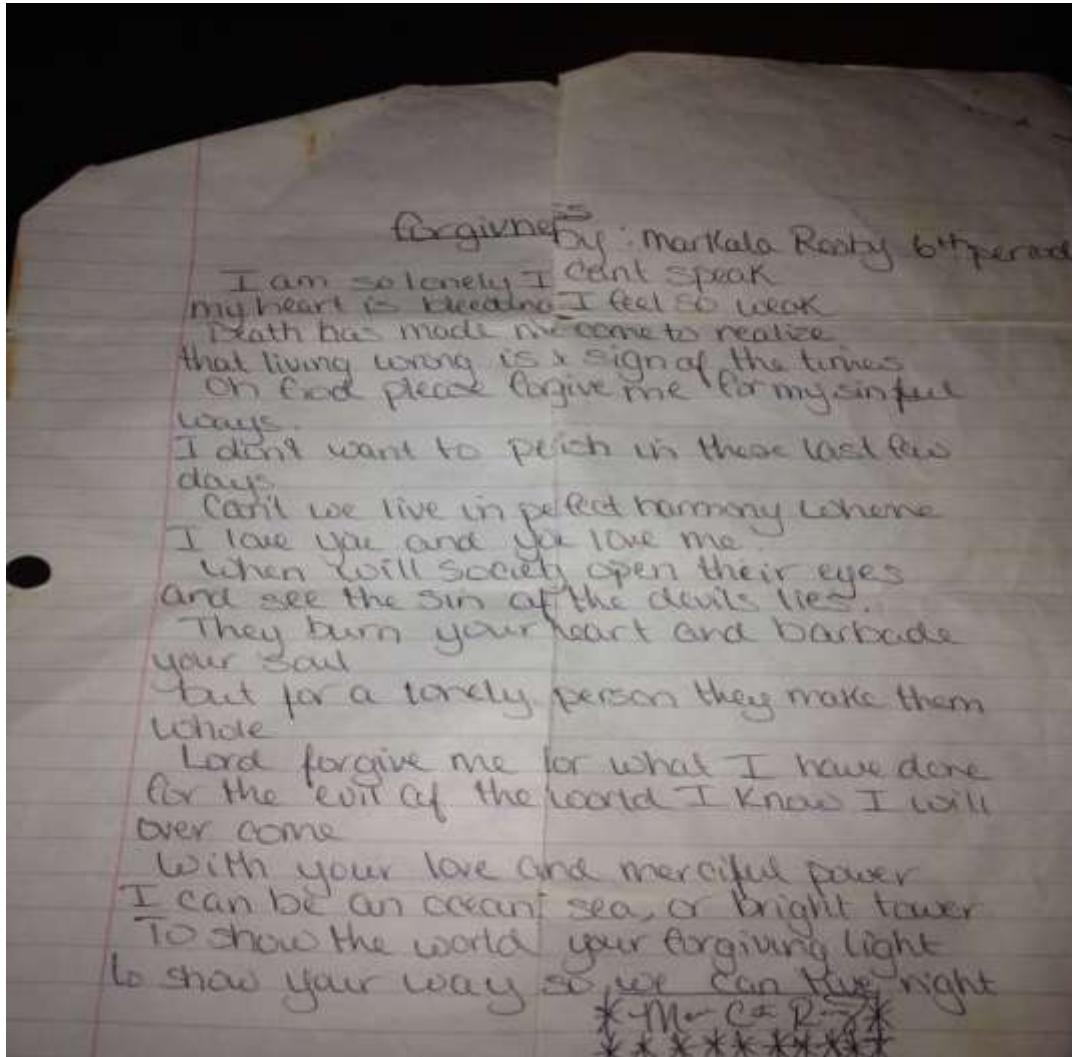
deeply rooted in my familial upbringing. My parents valued morality and “doing right” in terms of religious morality. More times than not, my parents would provide an explanation as to why my behavior was considered immoral or they would provide inductive reasoning, such as “it hurts when you hit.” My parents supported my moral development in terms of me caring for others, as research suggest feminine morality highlights the aspect of “care” (Berk, 2010). My mother reinforced behavior which supported this principled idea particularly in my play activities. My parents offered immediate repercussions for immoral behavior, but at times those repercussions caused shame and guilt to develop. This stage coincided with Kohlberg’s preconventional level, stage 1.

There are extreme gaps in my middle childhood moral development. I do remember that I was somewhat of an enforcer of morality in which I would constantly point out immoralities, which would lead to me being considered a know-it-all amongst my peers. Religious morality was still imperative to my parents during this period. I do not recall any liberty to express personal choices in regards to religious values until adulthood. I was raised with the notion, “if you live under my roof, you will obey my rules.” During this period, I also grappled with social morality and religious morality. I desired to be accepted by friends which would at times contradict my religious morality. This stage would represent Kohlberg’s stage 3 on the conventional level.

During my emergence into adulthood, peer relationships still influenced my morality development. Research suggests that peers are sources of influence and provide avenues for conflict and adoption to differing values (Kiran-Esen, 2012). I began to be able to view morality in terms of a flexible and changing concept and began to see morality through the perspective of others. During this period, my undergraduate and graduate experience provided much

opportunity for perspective taking and examination of justice and ethics. This stage of my moral development reflects multi-stages of Kohlberg's moral development, including, stage 4 of the conventional level and elements of the postconventional principled levels.

### Pictorial Evidence of Moral Development



The above picture depicts a poem titled forgiveness, which was written in my 10<sup>th</sup> grade class. Although I was not aware of it at the time, this poem tells of my emergence into the Kohlberg's conventional level of morality. The poem portrays the struggle to obey social and religious rules and promote social harmony. The poem also shows the struggle between acceptance by others which may result in acts of sin or religious immorality.

## Summary

There is a cohesive theme of development throughout my life span. There were many times in my development, where the developmental domains interacted with and where contingent upon the development of another domain. Although most of my development proceeded within developmental norms, there were times in which research opposed my actual developmental experience, such as my cultural background in terms of physical and cognitive development. I attribute that opposition to my development of resiliency and I contribute my resiliency to my familial nurture. Research has shown that protective factors, such as nurturing caregivers, social and emotional competencies and meaningful participation at school, can provide successful development (Madsen, Hicks, & Thompson, 2011) all to which my experiences have accounted. Whether my development traveled a traditional course or whether there were times in which my development seemed off course, all facets and domains have congruently worked together to form the person I am today.

As I synthesize my insight in which I gained from exploring my developmental history, there is no denying that even the subtle and overt aspects of my family of origin and culture, all played a role in my development. By exploring my developmental life span, I have gained insight into some reoccurring themes that I have yet to resolve. I have also begun to better understand the relationship between nature and nurture in my own life. It is interesting to see how my life experiences could have been completely different, if I was born into a less caring, less supportive and less trusting family. One aspect in which I did not address is the role in which my parents' developmental themes played in the manner in which they interacted with me. This emerging insight has caused me to continue to resolve some aspects of my development

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which I have control over, as to not transfer those aspects into approaching developmental stages, which hopefully include marriage and children.

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