

Needles, Nerves, and Nurturing

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Instructor: Sarah Ross

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I hate needles. That doesn't come as a shock to most people who know me. I'm a wuss. I have a fairly long list of phobias, but needles rank right up there at the top. I once read somewhere that public speaking is the number one fear of most Americans. Coming in a not-so-close second place was death. So the way I interpret that statistic, that must mean that at a funeral, most people would rather be in the casket than giving the eulogy. That's pretty shocking. So what does this have to do with my fear of needles, you may ask? Not much. I just figured that since this paper is for extra credit, I can pretty much write whatever I want and not have to worry about getting a bad grade for being creative, so I just thought I'd throw that in there for giggles and make it a little more entertaining. But it actually does tie in. Can you guess what the third-ranking fear of most Americans is? Needles. (Okay, not really. I made all that up, but I hear that 90% of all statistics are made up anyway, so I guess it is possible that I could've read that somewhere.)

So I'm terrified of needles, but they say that what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, and I am certainly banking on that to be true every time I go to the Blood Center to donate blood, which is about every two months. I don't like it, but it's just such a good thing to do. I used to give whenever they would come around in those buses, but I stopped doing that after my first visit to the Blood Center. I discovered that you get much more individual attention when you go to the Blood Center at about seven o'clock on a Thursday night. In the bus, there are generally several people trying to give blood simultaneously, and the people working just can't sit beside

me and hold my hand and fan my face like they should. At the Blood Center, I'm usually all by myself, and the nice ladies that work there do a fantastic job of putting up with me, and believe me, I give them a hard time. I am not a very good patient. Oh, but they'll call and call, and leave message after message on my answering machine and make me feel all guilty, "Hi, Morgan. This is Patty from the Blood Center. We are in desperate need of O positive blood right now. There is a terrible shortage in the community. If you could come and donate sometime soon, we would all really appreciate it, dear. See you soon!" Well, if they want my blood that badly, I'm going to make them work for it.

So when I first got there, of course I apologized and told them I hadn't eaten since I woke up at noon (Thursday is my only day off), and that was only a Nutty Buddy I saved since my last visit to my parents' house. But if I told them the truth--that I really just came from the nearest Taco Bell drive-through--then they would be less likely to encourage me to help myself to the peanut butter fudge good ole Miss Patty always makes for the donors. Anyway, after I filled up on fudge, it was on to the pop quiz. Well, first they pricked my ear to make sure my iron count was high enough, and boy, wouldn't you know mine is always perfect, which I can't comprehend, because as you may have noticed by now, I don't exactly tote Power Bars around in my backpack. The ear prick wasn't so bad, though. It was much less painful than the finger prick, which I will personally never get again. The best part was that I couldn't see what was going on, and I never even knew it happened until it was over and the pop quiz began. I come close to failing it every time, but luckily, they always pass me. The nice lady asked a series of questions, most of which were incredibly personal, and she never looked me in the eye. The general rule of thumb is to answer with a no. But of course, it couldn't be that easy for me. "Yes, ma'am, I have been out of the United States or Canada in the past year." She ventured a brief

glance in my direction and raised her eyebrows. “I went to Cancun on senior trip.” She got out her big binder and made sure Cancun was safe. It was. I could’ve told her that, but they never listen to me anyway. The pop quiz continued, and I was doing well until... “Yes, ma’am, I am currently on medication.” The eyebrows went up again. “I take a daily antibiotic called minocycline.” The binder came out again to make sure this one was safe. It was. I could’ve told her that too, but they never listen to me. More questions, another unfortunate affirmative answer. “Yes, ma’am, I have had a major illness in the past year.” More eyebrow action. “I had mono last spring, but I’ve been released by my doctor and have not shown any symptoms since.” I’ve done this before. She seemed satisfied with that response to her implied question and passed me. It was my lucky day.

After the quiz, I took a seat on the comfortable little bed closest to the television (neither of which are available on the bus, by the way) and began to try to calm myself down by engrossing myself in the episode of Friends in front of me. It was seven o’clock on Thursday, after all. But not even my Friends could calm my nerves in this situation. Some say that the worst part of giving blood is the finger prick, but apparently they haven’t been since they started doing the ear thing, and if that’s the case, then they probably don’t have an answering machine. There’s not much about donating blood that I enjoy, but I have a lengthy list of things I do not. One thing is the tourniquet they always have to use on me. And I really hate getting my blood pressure taken. And I hate that they won’t let me cross my ankles on the bed. And I hate squeezing to make a fist over and over again to make the blood flow because my hand always gets so tired. And of course I have tiny veins, so they almost always have to stick me more than once, and that’s never good. But I say the absolute worst part is just thinking about it. I turn into a complete head case. I get myself so psyched out and worked up that I just start panicking. Somehow, I

always get through it though, and most of the time it's without a scratch. Although, I do recall having a rather nasty bruise for a few days afterwards one time, but that was because I was on the bus.

I know I said that there's not much about donating blood that I enjoy, but that's not really true. I like that a kid gets to go to camp every time I give. I like that they let me watch whatever I want on television. I like that they give me the good apple juice from the back instead of the sugary red stuff everybody else gets because I'm a "special" donor. I like the fact that because I gave one little bitty pint of blood, it might have helped save someone's life. And I really like the peanut butter fudge. But I still hate needles.

Morgan Blades is studying basic curriculum. Mrs. Sarah Ross was her English instructor.

Mrs. Ross' Comments: *As part of our study of American Literature, my class and I explore the continuing theme of "connection to community" as revealed by the writers. I also offer my students bonus points for performing a community service and writing about their own "connection to community" as discovered through their act of service. Morgan Blades chose to donate blood and writes a surprisingly delightful description of her experience. She humorously finds her own good connections.*