



My Coaching Experience with The College Bound Foundation

By Sherry Coveney

Why I started. Things had been going pretty well for me. I was happily married, had no children, and had a great job. With all this good fortune, I was afraid I might be due for some bad luck. I also wanted to do something more meaningful for society, and I was secretly hoping that this would give me good karma.

What I expected. Growing up, I had tutored other kids, so I thought tutoring would be a good a good fit. I expected to work with some motivated child who wanted straight A's, and that I could help her interpret textbooks and answer questions. I expected that eventually she would be accepted to several colleges and universities.

What happened. The College Bound Foundation matched me with a lovely little girl, 11 years old, in the 6th grade. She had a mom, who graduated high school, no dad in the picture, and an older sister who had obtained her GED. My student might be the first one in the family to go to college!

Where we are today. She is now 16. I've seen her every week, except when one of us was traveling, or sick. It has been 5 ½ years, and she will soon be 17! She is a lovely young woman entering 12th grade next fall.

What I'm clueless about. I don't know what we have. I care for her. She agrees to see me most of the time. She is not a chatty young lady. She's very private, and I don't really know what's going on in her life. I don't know what they talk about at home, or how they talk to each other. She does not ask me questions.

What's scary. Factoring polynomials, a book report for a book neither of us read, and talking to a teenager about sex, drugs, and HIV.

What's working. Following the methods in the math book can sometimes work. Saying "I don't know" gives her the freedom to say it too. Bringing in newspaper articles for her to read, and discussing them afterwards gives us a chance to talk and practice organizing thoughts. She passed the high school exit exam so she only needs a few credits to graduate high school, and she can tell you exactly which ones. She took the SAT recently, and we will find out soon what her scores were. She wants to go to college, and will probably target a community college.

What I learned. She will read out loud what I hand her. This gave us an excuse to continue meeting through the summers. She is an independent thinker, and is not inclined to do something just because everyone else is doing it. I can talk to her about sex, drugs, and HIV! She listens! It's not about school, grades, or college--it's about showing her I care. It's not about what I do with her, it's about doing something with her and caring.

My hopes for the future. For me, I hope our relationship continues for as long as she wishes. When that occurs, I hope to start coaching another young student. For my student, I hope she goes to community college, then on to graduate from a four-year college. I hope she discovers her own interests, lands a nice job in her chosen area and continues to develop into a lovely young woman, who becomes financially independent, chooses a good man to marry, raises a family, and thinks fondly of me from time to time. My hope for anyone who is considering volunteering is that you give it a shot. You have more to offer than you can imagine--don't judge or criticize yourself, just be there for your student.