

Savannah Cook

August 3, 2023

Dayspring Pens Scholarship Essay

During a stop in Barnes & Noble earlier this year, I found myself drawn to reading the sleeve of a book called *Really Good, Actually*. Something about the cover caught my eye, and the synopsis on the back piqued my interest. A quick trip through checkout led me on a 384-page-long journey, wherein I found myself deeply connecting with protagonist and narrator Maggie.

I could write a 500-word summary just on Maggie – a 29-year old recently divorced post-graduate student who is really just doing her best. Maggie is a mess, no doubt, as she actively shapes and explores the paths on her new journey. But in her messiness is earnestness, and I found her endearing in a way I couldn't have anticipated. Author Monica Heisey created a character that I almost felt sorry for, until I found myself identifying with her-on many levels. I myself am not divorced, nor have I ever been married. I am not a post-graduate student of Shakespearean studies (I notoriously get all Shakespeare questions wrong when watching *Jeopardy*), nor do I intend to ever become a PhD candidate. I am, however, a woman who is really just doing my best on a life path that hasn't gone as expected.

Maggie narrates this story through a filter of cynical self-awareness that I understand all too well. I am twenty-nine years old (the same age as Maggie), and currently working two jobs to stay afloat while I pursue my education. My story is unconventional, and my path to get where I am today has been harrowing and unpredictable. I had every intention of attending community college fresh out of high school and “finding myself”; pursuing things that brought me joy and helped me discover who I am as an individual. Those plans, however, were thwarted following a

fall my grandmother sustained in her garage-one that left her with a broken hip and a lengthy rehabilitation. During her stay in a dingy fluorescent rehab facility, her cognition declined and the symptoms of the Alzheimer's she had been diagnosed with seven years prior reared their ugly heads. All my hopes for this life I had imagined for myself came to an abrupt halt. I moved into her home as a live-in caregiver, a role I held for almost seven years until her passing in 2021. Since then, I have had to navigate grief while revisiting the dreams I had long-since abandoned.

While reading *Really Good, Actually*, I wept with Maggie, felt all of her guilt, and became embroiled in her struggles. She and I both must make peace with the perceived failing of a retrospective cost that didn't pay off as hoped. Maggie is often delusional, convincing herself things aren't as bad as they truly are, but she understands. I understand. I don't know what my future will look like exactly. My ability to foresee such things with the vivid clarity of imagination has been dulled by reality. I understand now I can continue do my best, and that will be enough.