

Journal Entry from May 10, 2018

2:15am

Daniel Summers

I was cold in the February rain. There was anxiety. There was uncertainty. We sure did laugh a lot and bond.

Nine days we stood on Cheat Road--857. I live near there. I shop at the stores on the hill in Pierpont Plaza. I have filled my gas tank at the gas station which stood behind us while we shivered and shouted our various joys at the harsh call of car horns. I was cold and wet and afraid. It was like I woke up a child. All of my professional scripture and experience was taken, my future suddenly uncertain. We stood on the road that led to my home and called it the line. As if the term held a weight and concept beyond a litter strewn patch of highway. In a way, the line was inside us, it was a place where we stood and refused to back away any further.

For nine days the line became a mantra--solidarity--the belief that we were not complaining, but fighting.

Just keep standing, it will be okay. Just keep writing the legislators, it will be okay. Just keep writing the opinion pieces, it will be okay. So I did those things. I wrote emails. I wrote for national publications. I wrote for books and other teachers and local newspapers. I stood on the line and I stood in front of the Governor of West Virginia. I told him to believe in us, in our strength and unity. I asked him if he would be a voice for teachers. He didn't say much, but I heard, "Ask me in November." And I was cold.

I remember thinking about the Isaac Newton quote about standing on the shoulders of giants. We have it hanging on the wall in the stairwell outside my classroom. Is that what teachers are, giants? We must be, our shadows are long in the lives of those we teach. I suppose giants shiver in the rain and miss their newborn daughters.

West Virginia has grown deeply into me. I have bones buried in the hills that I love. My father's bones are here, so are his mother's bones. I'm drawn to the idea of place. I'm in love with this place. I believe in West Virginia, it has my roots. But the roots are weathered, eroding with the ineptitude of lawmakers, like a torrent the disrespect pours onto the hillside of my life's dedication.

I wanted to shout: "How dare they." I shouted: "We're not gonna take it anymore." I told myself West Virginians' know something about standing our ground. Didn't my grandfather churn coal into piles?

Listen, we have a responsibility to the young. I have thought a lot about this; I believe in teachers. The young need to know the world. We try to give them a space to see it. It is hard work. It is heartbreaking. It is beautiful. I am in love with teaching, with its purity and purpose.

This State needs that purity and purpose. But, the giants are being driven from the mountains. They are being driven to the cities and the suburbs. They go where the money is. They go where the respect is. So we stood. We demanded.

I don't think legislators listened, not really. But they heard. We will haunt them in the polls. We will rise united to bring prosperity into our profession. The resources are finite, we have reminded them of that. We have cried out, like giants, we see farther than you because we see the future generations, we lift them on our shoulders and they touch the clouds; they touch the moon; they grab the atmosphere and sometimes they don't come back down. In the end they are bigger than us, their potential is beyond our reach. But they deserve a leg up. That is why I am here. That is why I stood. I stood tall.