

NINA: The Case of a Creatively Gifted Student

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Background

I want to be creative, because if I was like everybody else, well . . . the world wouldn't be as cool. If everybody was the same person, and everybody always acted the same, then, who cares? What's the big deal? But, by being creative, people are different. . . . So, I think that I want to be creative because it makes me different from everybody else. And nobody can come up and say, "I'm just like you. You're not special." Being creative makes everybody special, makes everybody different.

Nina, a sixth-grade public school student who served as the focus of this case study, is eleven years old, Caucasian, and from a lower middle-class background. She is also a highly able and creatively gifted child.

Methodology

The school district coordinator of the gifted program recommended that Nina be interviewed as a prime example of a creative, upper elementary student. "Nina," she said, "really stands out. When I teach a hundred and twenty [gifted] kids, she's at the top." Deciding to proceed with the case study based upon the initial profile, corresponding permission to conduct the study was obtained from Nina's father, from the assistant superintendent of the school district, and from Nina herself.

The methodology employed in this case study incorporated interviews, observation, and document analysis. The researcher interviewed Nina formally on two separate occasions. Interviews were also conducted with her father, her Writer's Lab instructor, and with the coordinator of her gifted program. (It was not possible to interview Nina's mother due to her unavailability throughout the period of this research.) Written evaluations from a number of her teachers, both past and present, were also reviewed.

Observations were conducted during the pullout gifted program of which Nina was a part. Documents providing evidence for the study included Nina's grade

reports from previous years and the ongoing school year, evaluations of her performance in the gifted program, standardized aptitude and achievement test scores, and samples of her academic and creative work covering an approximately seven-year time span. Content analysis was subsequently employed to process the raw data derived from these sources, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the evidence.

Evidences of High Ability

Nina has always lived in the city where she was born. Nina's father is a landscape architect. Her mother, who had worked for a number of years as a restaurant cook, was pursuing a graduate degree at the time of the study. Her grandmother, on her father's side, is a designer, potter, and painter. Nina has three siblings—an older half sister and two younger half brothers. Her parents, who have joint custody of Nina, have been separated since she was four years old.

Some of the earliest evidences of Nina's ability center about her artistic talent. Her early drawings are full of color, quite highly detailed, and vibrant with personality and action. One of these drawings, for example, was of a cat—peering back over its shoulder, tail high in the air, poised in mid-step. Later drawings, however, were often more abstract.

For the past two years, Nina has participated in a special weekly program for students who are gifted in the visual arts. An instructor in this program noted Nina's ability to view and think about things with "an abstract, creative eye." In this same line, the coordinator of the gifted program reported that Nina would often create intricate designs from paper during her free time at school

She just can take that piece of paper and—not looking at anything or not really sitting for a long time trying to figure out "How am I going to do this?"—she just starts folding it. And ends up coming up with something that makes sense to the rest of us. So she doesn't need a model to go by, and then change that. She really can come up with a model herself.

Nina's creative endeavors extend beyond the arts, however. At home, for example, Nina has designed her own room in rather unique detail, with a large loft sheltering her desk and closet. Similarly, many of Nina's school projects evidence creative thought. When preparing an information box on the state of Kansas, for example, she decided to depict a tornado theme in a rather novel manner.

I took some wire from my dad's and I put it in like a circle, and it got bigger at the top. And I sort of hooked it inside of my box, and it was a tornado. And it was really cool, because it was made out of wire. And I took little houses from Monopoly and glued them on it, and glued these little rocks on it and stuff.

In her computer science class for gifted students, Nina had just finished an independent Lego/LOGO project in which she and her partner had created a people transporter. Her teacher noted that the two girls "came up with some of the most clever uses of material in putting it together." Although the end product did not work exactly as anticipated, due to technical difficulties, the instructor observed that Nina "added so much more creativity than a lot of kids did."

Although she did not see Nina as one of her best writers, the writing instructor observed, nevertheless, that she is "a very talented writer" and had written "some very beautiful poetry." A salient characteristic seems to be that Nina will try out many different ideas and perspectives in her writing. While noting that many students would become locked into one format or style, her teacher remarked that Nina would try "lots of things . . . different lengths and different stanza arrangements." She further observed that Nina's critiques of other students' work deviated from the norm.

She just doesn't say the typical critique. Some of the kids will just sort of use the same phrases over and over when they critique. And she really seems to get at the essence of people's work, and take a creative point of view on, you know, the way that a stanza could be changed, or something that she got from a particular section of a poem or a story.

While describing Nina as a "fluent and flexible thinker," the coordinator of the gifted program also maintained that she was highly able in the analytical as well as the creative realm. Available evidence does indeed point to the fact that Nina is an academically gifted student, consistently achieving at exceptional scholastic levels.

In first grade, Nina scored at the 99th percentile on the Verbal scale of the COGAT, and at the 83rd percentile on the Quantitative and Nonverbal scales. On the most recent ITBS administration, she placed at the 90th percentile on Total Language scale, 98th percentile on Total Math scale, and 98th percentile on the Complete Composite.

On her grade reports, Nina received all A's during both transpired terms of her sixth grade year. During fifth grade, she had also received only grades of A in all

subjects. Consistently, she had reached the highest honor roll at her school, her teachers indicating outstanding projects and academic performance at above-grade-level standards.

These recent accomplishments, in fact, are consistent with Nina's academic performance during the first four grades. During fourth grade, for example, Nina was selected as the student of the week at her school. The citation, presented by the principal of the school, proclaimed Nina to be a "sensational student."

She finds interest in all areas of learning and is endlessly curious about so many things. She loves learning and is energetic in her pursuit. All of her reading activities are descriptive and jammed full of interesting details. . . . Even the sentences for her work study lists develop into interesting plots. Nina is a master at division and can solve some very difficult problems. She sticks with a topic until she gets it right.

Nina's teachers during those early elementary years concurred. The fourth grade teacher described Nina as a critical and creative thinker—employing such adjectives as "fantastic," "clever," "insightful," and "ingenious." In the year-end evaluation, the teacher declared that Nina was "remarkably bright, creative, and artistic—a self-motivated and self-challenging student who set high standards for herself." Similarly, her third grade teacher had found her to be a "reflective and critical reader," performing above grade level and demonstrating an exceptional understanding of humor and the subtleties of a story.

While in the second grade, Nina was formally identified as a gifted student and has participated in the programs for gifted students since that time. Over the past five years, her performance evaluations in the pullout gifted program have been consistently positive, noting "strong problem-solving skills," "flexibility in thinking," and the development of a "sophisticated sense of humor." When instructed to develop a personal invention, for example, she planned and constructed a bed-making machine. When asked to design an original universe in the Mother Nature game, the teacher reported that Nina created "increasingly complex patterns."

Perhaps it was the coordinator of Nina's gifted program, however, who summarized her abilities most succinctly: "She's got a multitude of strengths, and she uses them well. And she projects them well, so that you recognize them." It does, indeed, seem evident that Nina is both a highly creative and highly able student across academic areas.

Life Spheres

Certain social spheres intersect and coalesce into the mosaic of Nina's life. These areas include self, family, school, and extracurricular/peer dimensions.

Self

Nina describes herself as "fairly intelligent," adding that she is "not like stupid or really, really smart." Her teachers, however, have observed that she is unusually bright and often quite intuitive—one teacher, for instance, noting that an important strength was found in her ability to "size up a situation." Her father mentioned a similar characteristic.

She will often absorb a small amount of information, and then makes some kind of leap to a correct answer. She did that from the time that she's been very young. She would be able to—I don't want to say understand things—but to have this intuitive sense—and she still has it—that the answer is going to be such and such an answer.

Nina is also quite articulate. Her father noted that she "loves to talk, and she loves to describe things." Even when very young, she enjoyed telling stories. Nina herself put the matter quite simply, "I like to talk a lot." Observing Nina, one would be lead to concur.

Family and friends are some of the most important considerations for Nina, particularly in terms of their well-being. "I just don't like my friends to feel bad, or my family to feel bad. Because I want everybody to be happy." Her father noted that she "likes people" and seems to relate well to others—whether peers, adults, or small children. Observations of Nina's relationships to others seemed to bear this out. As she would walk down the halls in her school of approximately 700 students, nearly everyone—teachers and students alike—would greet her by name, and frequently she would stop and chat with them for a moment or two. The Writing Lab instructor summarized this trait as Nina's ability to "support and nurture other kids and adults."

In terms of personality, Nina is both intense and labile. Her father described her most prominent characteristic as "mercurial."

She is very passionate. And her passions run the emotional extremes. In a short period of time, she can be very, very up and then very, very down and then very, very up again. She is extremely animated. She has an incredible amount of energy.

While maintaining that Nina is generally upbeat and knows how to “work within the system,” one of her teachers also observed that she can become “sort of sulky” if others don’t want to listen to her or if they squash her ideas. Apparently, Nina takes injury very personally, especially if she feels that she has not been given the credit or respect that she believes she deserves. These down times, however, do not seem to last long—most often but a few minutes in duration.

Another personal trait seems to be Nina’s desire for flexibility within structure.

I like places that are clean, but if . . . something is perfectly organized, and if you mess something up and someone gets really mad—I hate that. Because my grandmother likes everything to be really neat, *except* she’s got a basement where we can screw everything up, and she won’t care. So . . . I don’t like everything being too terribly neat, but I like it being fairly neat.

The need for overarching order is further borne out in an incident that Nina recalled from the time when she was in second grade. It seems that most of the children were running about the classroom. “I could hardly stand that,” she said. She had called out to them, “Sit down. Sit down! SIT DOWN! We’re supposed to be sitting down!”

The coordinator of the gifted program commented that Nina appears to be highly motivated by challenge and choice, and less impelled by the mundane. This desire for challenge has begun to translate into a certain amount of risk-taking. Her father, for example, believes that Nina is “developing the ability to take chances, whereas when she was younger that was not so much the case.” An illustration of this trend may be found in the explanation of her dream to sky dive. “I’ve got this little fear of falling,” she said. “But . . . I think that it must be cool to just be flying through the air for like ten seconds without anything holding you up.”

Family

“Generally,” Nina maintains, “I can relate to everybody in my family.” While describing her mother as “my friend,” she was, nevertheless, quick to add “sometimes, of course, every mother and daughter have disputes.” Her relationship with her father also appears to be generally positive. Her father agreed, “We have a great relationship.” He also mentioned, however, that “Nina is a very powerful individual. She has a great deal of energy and she is learning how to use it to *jak* my chains.” Later, he again referred to Nina as “a very strong individual,” who “isn’t about to back down.”

Nina's relationship to her stepfather appears to be more rocky, and she acknowledged that sometimes she wishes that her stepfather "was a little different."

Sometimes I wish that if I do something bad, and Mom's telling me something and I disagree with her. . . . Then [my stepfather, by first name] will come in and put in his two cents. And I wish that he wouldn't. Because it doesn't really involve him. It makes me feel like he's trying to take over my life. And so, I wish that [he] would sort of mind his own business a little bit more.

Although Nina observed that "everybody's getting a divorce" in her extended family, she maintained that her parents' separation is not the cause of any personal difficulties.

You know, it's weird. Everybody thinks that a kid whose parents are divorced should wish that their parents were together. But I don't. I mean, they got separated when I was four. So I'm just not used to having them together. And if they got together, that would be really weird.

Rather, family "disputes" in Nina's life appear to center about family rules. Although declaring that her parents "have pretty fair rules," she finds some regulations rather difficult at times to accept.

I'm supposed to respect my parents, and not talk back. But I do every once in a while. But I shouldn't do that, though. I do my chores, sometimes. I think that [the rules] are pretty fair. But . . . like, my mom expects me to respect her greatly. And if she tells me to do something, I'm supposed to do it, then and there. But, I don't think that's fair.

Nevertheless, Nina stated that she would usually acquiesce to her parents' wishes. "I will help around the house when [my mom] tells me about seventeen times." Her father agreed that his daughter, while at times remiss in fulfilling her responsibilities, was not generally rebellious.

She's very interested in doing what she wants to do, and is not the slightest bit interested in maintaining what should be her responsibilities. I often have to insist that she clean her room and do her chores, or whatever. But she will do them. I mean, she's not rebellious. She's just forgetful. There are more important things for her to do.

In terms of her relationship to her siblings, Nina asserted, "we are great friends" most of the time, "get along OK" other times, and "then sometimes, we just don't get along at all." The generally positive relationship with her siblings,

however, was attested by the comments of others who knew Nina. The coordinator of the gifted program, for example, observed that Nina would frequently mention her older sister's accomplishments, and the Writer's Lab teacher noted that she "seems proud of her sister."

When asked to recall an especially unforgettable moment or event in her life, Nina spoke of the time when her father took her and her sister to the beach for an extended learning "field trip." Although she thought that the experience was more difficult than regular school, she also believed ("don't tell the teacher this") that "it was more fun." She maintained, in fact, that this time at the beach had helped her to become a more creative person.

If somebody had said [before], "Write a story about the beach," I'd write a story about some kid driving to the beach and going swimming. But now, I might write a story about an animal that lived in the dune swell, and all of a sudden the dune just sort of collapsed over it because of all the erosion. And, they had to run. They had to get over the frontal dune. But when they saw it, there wasn't even a frontal dune! So they ran over to the rear dune, and the rear dune was almost gone. So they jumped over it and ran and ran. And all of sudden, they're on the boardwalk. And they ran down the boardwalk—these are little crabs. He ran down the boardwalk, and he's running and running and running. And he ran to the maritime forest. "Oh no! There's no water here!" So he kept on running and he kept on running. And he came to a swamp. "No! It's not a swamp, it's a marsh. Yeah!" He found a place to stay. So . . . [laughs.] That was sort of odd, but . . . Now I could do something like that, and involve what I learned.

School

Nina seems to thoroughly enjoy her educational experience. "School is fun!" she exclaimed when queried regarding her school activities. Her father echoed the same idea: "She loves school, and she does great." The affinity for school, in fact, does seem to be closely allied to the fact that Nina excels in her schoolwork.

I really like school. . . . If I was a really bad student, I doubt that I would like it. But, I'm a good student, and I understand things when the teacher says something. And I usually pay enough attention to know what [the teacher] is talking about when she starts talking about something different. And so, I like school because I'm a good student, and I know what's going on.

While thus seeing herself as a good student and particularly able in the area of math, Nina was also quick to point out that she did not consider herself to be a “major brainiac.” Her teachers, nevertheless, noted that she “catches things very quickly,” maintains “high standards for her work,” shows “great initiative and creativeness,” “gets down to business,” is “self-motivated,” and “excels in math.” She was further described as a “a terrific listener as well as speaker,” and as a “critical thinker and caring person.” Her projects were judged to evidence “ingenuity and creative quality,” her stories to exhibit “great sensitivity and knowledge,” and her contributions to discussions to add “great details and insights.”

In a related construct, Nina saw herself as manifesting good behavior in school. “I’m not saying that I have perfect behavior, because I don’t have perfect behavior. But I have good behavior.” While she does not believe that she is the type of student to be “goofing off in class all the time,” she neither views herself as “the kind of person who just sits there, perfectly normal, and does everything exactly how they say.” While remarking that Nina may evidence some boisterousness at times, her teachers unanimously concurred with the evaluation that Nina “is a lovely person.” They further noted that Nina “assumes responsibility well,” “has a fine attitude,” is “courteous and cooperative,” and is “definitely a lot of fun to work with.” One instructor, in fact, concluded: “I am lucky to be her teacher.”

In terms of academic motivation, Nina sees her schoolwork as important because she wants to attend the university in town someday. She also wants to “keep good grades.”

Grades are very important. I have to keep my grades up. . . . I’m not like saying, “I have to get an A every single time.” But if I get a B, I want to try to bring it up to an A. Because, you know . . . I probably want to get A’s because if somebody asks me what I got on my report card, I can just say, “A’s.” It’s easier than, “A, a B, a B, an A, let me see. . . .” It’s just easier.

Beyond grades, however, Nina seems to be motivated by the sheer joy of learning. “I like to learn new things,” she declared on various occasions. Nina seems to enjoy learning most, however, when she herself is in control of the learning experience. When describing, for example, some learning encounters that she did and did not enjoy, Nina addressed this matter.

I don’t like going to museums. Well, I do like going to museums. But I don’t like the kind where, like there’s a guide and they go like, “This

is from the 1800s where blah, blah, blah. . .” Where it’s really, really boring. But if I’m there by myself, then I’ll look at the stuff and think that it’s really cool.

Likewise, the instructor of the computer course pointed out that Nina does not appear to be greatly interested in “following the book and going through the steps,” but that she seems to thoroughly enjoy experimentation and open-endedness.

This desire for autonomy and openness emerged again in Nina’s discussion of her experiences with creativity in school. She explained, for example, that she did not feel that she was being as creative as she could be, when someone imposed on her the subject of a story that she was to write.

If somebody tells me, “Go write a story,” I’ll be more creative than if they tell me, “Go write a story about a dog named Joe.” So I feel less creative when somebody tells me pretty much everything that I have to do. Like, if they say, “Go write a story about a dog named Joe, who got on a skateboard, rode down the street, and ran into a fire hydrant.” I mean, that’s the whole story! I don’t get to make up any of it, pretty much. I feel more creative if they say, “Go write a story about a dog” or “Go write a story,” in the first place.

In this line, Nina stated that she felt more creative when she was not pressured to create a specific product. As a case in point, she remembered having to keep “these dumb journal entries . . . and pretend to be somebody like from the 1700’s.” In contrast, she spoke of her own diary.

I’ve got this journal that I got when I was seven years old, and like once in a year I write in it. And I feel that I’m more creative then, than when I’m writing in my journal at school. Because she tells us what to write about. We have to write it or we’ll get in trouble. And it’s just not as much fun.

Nina also feels that many of the reports that she has written for school are not very creative. She maintains that they were very “straight forward” and merely “fill of facts” regarding what happened. “I wasn’t really putting any twist into it, so they weren’t very fun to read. I didn’t want to read them!” she laughed. When asked why she did not try to make these reports more creative, she thought for a moment. “Sometimes, I wish I could be more creative on some of those. But then, again, I think that if I had been too creative, I wouldn’t have gotten an A on it.” She then recalled an occasion in which she had attempted to give her report an original flair.

Well, I wrote a report once and I started out on the subject, then I got really creative. And I started thinking, "Hey! This is really cool." And I kept writing stuff. And by the time, like . . . these weren't the actual things, but like I started with Abraham Lincoln and I ended up with a banana. You know, I could just totally get off the subject, and just keep on writing junk. And I'm like, "I've got to write this all over again! This isn't a report."

Although Nina maintained that the gifted program at her school has fostered her creativity, few other school activities seem to have provided opportunity for creative expression. Thus, it is not surprising that Nina finds herself to be most creative when she is not at school.

Well, when I'm sitting in class and I'm writing a story, I don't feel as creative as when I'm sitting in a tree out on my Grandma's farm with this tiny little notepad, writing a story. Because sitting in class is just boring, trying to think of something to write. But when you're up in a tree somewhere over there, you have more ideas and things come to you easier, I think.

I feel sometimes that I'm more creative at home when I'm trying to go to sleep, than when I'm sitting in Humanities class listening to the teacher talk. Because, when I'm trying to go to sleep, I just. . . . Everything runs through my mind that happened that day. And I can think of things, and I don't think of anything else, and so I don't worry about anything.

In addition to being motivated by curricular flexibility and by her desire to be a top performer, Nina also appears to gain academic motivation from teacher and peer interaction. The instructor of the Writer's Lab perceived that Nina liked to be visible to people, and particularly relished interactions with her teachers. She further noted that Nina "enjoys anything that involves discussion, anything that involves defending a point of view, debating." The coordinator of the gifted program likewise observed that "activities that involve peer interaction are motivating to her," to the point that she would much prefer that mode to working by herself.

In relations with her fellow students, Nina frequently emerges as a leader. The teacher of her computer class, for example, believes that Nina has given clear evidences of strong leadership. "Her enthusiasm and her creativity are contagious. . . . She has the ability to make people feel good about [her creativity], rather than being jealous of it. And it becomes an inspiration, rather than a put down." She noted that Nina had served very capably as a group leader in the planning of an original city, supporting the efforts of the various group members.

In a similar vein, another teacher observed that Nina “encourages other kids” and has come a long way in “embracing all people, not just her clique of people.” The teacher of the Writer’s Lab saw Nina as “very affirming of everyone,” noting that she has “always been very sensitive with critique of other kid’s work.” A specific example came to her mind:

And I just remember one time . . . this boy, reading a poem last year . . . pretty reticent kid, not the strongest writer, not a kid in her peer group. A little Black boy who just hung around with different kids. And he finished reading this poem about a flower, that flower over there with the sunlight on it [a picture]. And he finished, and there was this pregnant pause. And you just hear Nina go, “Cooooo!” And she was just digesting this imagery, and I could tell that he was really affirmed by it. And it was spontaneous from her. She didn’t have to think of something to say. It just came out.

Extracurricular/Peer

The fourth dimension in Nina’s life involves peer influences and an assortment of extracurricular activities. In terms of peer relations, Nina enjoys her associations with her classmates and seems to have made many friends. The coordinator of her gifted program, however, observed that, while Nina “can work with anybody,” there are usually a few students that “she always sits with and chooses to be with.”

Although she appreciates individuals who are very different in personality from her own, Nina stated that her best friends are usually “a lot like me.” She explained that if she were to be best friends with someone who was “nothing like me, it would be hard to say like, ‘You know, I was feeling this the other day, and it was just really weird.’ They will have no idea what I [am] talking about.”

One personal trait that Nina has found vital to be reflected for compatibility purposes in her close friends is a “spur-of-the-moment” attitude. She quite emphatically declared that it is difficult for her to relate to peers who seem to want to plan life out for weeks or months in advance. Another trait that Nina values in her friends is that they treat her with fairness. This, she believed, was somewhat remiss in her friendships of the previous school year.

Last year, like we had our own little group. But I felt like I was sort of outside. But I think that everybody felt like I was inside, but . . . But I felt sort of away from it. Because . . . I was still really good friends with these people; but [friend A] would go up to [friend B], and start talking to her when [friend A] is in the middle of a conversation with

me. If [friend B] walks by, she'll go, "Hey, [friend B]! Blah, blah, blah." And go talking with [friend B]. And so, last year I was treated pretty fairly, but I'd like to be a little. . . Like when we were doing something, I'd like her not to walk away.

This year, however, Nina maintains that conditions have improved in this respect. "This year. . . , we treat each other fairly. I think everybody's like, in the group, now this year."

A third characteristic valued in her friends, and closely linked with the fairness motif, is the concept of parity. Nina expressed the idea in this way: "I want somebody who doesn't come up and go, 'I'm better than you' or 'I'm prettier than you.' I don't like somebody who will come up and insult somebody." In mentioning that some of her friends are older than she is, Nina similarly clarified that she didn't mind that they were older as long as they didn't "act like, 'I'm better than you, because I'm older than you.'"

In terms of extracurricular activities, Nina engages in quite a variety of pursuits. While these may range from writing in a notebook while perched in a tree on her grandmother's farm to preparing homemade gifts for her friends and classmates, the two most common denominators are activity and association. Her father once remarked that Nina, in her free time, elects to associate with other people. "She likes to be around other people, and it doesn't necessarily mean that they have to be her friends." He added that many times Nina would be content to do things with him, or "hang out with her sister and her sister's friends."

In her free time, Nina also enjoys outdoor physical activity. Her father observed that while she is very athletic, Nina is not interested in sports. Rather, she prefers to roller blade, play running games, ride bikes, or play Frisbee or informal ball games.

Perhaps, in the context of this dimension, it is meaningful that the individual whom Nina mentioned as one of her greatest heroes outside of the school context evidences these twin attributes of activity and interpersonal association.

There's Mr. Johnson, down at the Rec. He's a best friend of mine. He likes to get people into doing things. Like if someone's just sitting there, he's not going to let them sit there. He's going to say, "Why don't you do this, or this, or this, or this?" And so, I've sort of gotten into that. If someone's sitting there, I'm like, "Do you want to come do this with me?" or "Why don't you do that? She needs

someone to help her with that. But I'm doing this, so I can't help her with that. So do you want to help her with that?" So Mr. Johnson [is one of my heroes].

Themes and Issues

In this case study, six distinct, although often intertwining, themes seem to emerge. These dominant themes are (1) exuberance, (2) playfulness, (3) purpose, (4) confidence, (5) introspection, and (6) uniqueness. These strands, in turn, denote fundamental issues in Nina's life as a creatively gifted and highly able student.

Exuberance

During the first interview, Nina had declared, "I'm not quiet. I'm not saying that I yell, but I just do things more energetically than some other people would." As we met again for the second interview, practically the first words that Nina spoke were to clarify what she had said on that first occasion.

Last time, I didn't mean that I make more noise than other people—although sometimes I do. What I am is just more enthusiastic. I couldn't think of that word last time. It must have been in my subconscious.

Those who know her quite well seem to concur. Nina's father described her as "very passionate" and "extremely animated," with "an incredible amount of energy." Her third grade teacher had observed that she was "enthusiastic about all projects and aspects of learning." The instructor of the Writer's Lab characterized Nina as "very vivacious," "very joyful," and "pretty exuberant about things," noting that she was even able to "bring that same enthusiasm to things that she doesn't like." Likewise, the coordinator of the gifted program observed that Nina will attack a "problem with great enthusiasm, and really push herself"—"even though she knows that she is really good at it."

During the interview and observation periods, Nina did indeed appear to exude energy and passion. During the interviews, for example, she tended to be quite dramatic, utilizing expansive gestures, whistling, drumming on the table, and leaping frequently from her chair. These actions seemed to derive principally from the enthusiastic expression of her point of view, rather than merely representing the release of nervous energy. Nina, however, did state on one occasion: "I like to jump around a lot. I can't sit still for very long."

It is illuminating that all the preferred activities which Nina listed involve physical movement—riding bikes, roller blading, jumping rope, walking, running, skateboarding, and hopping on a pogo stick. At the recreation center afterschool on

some days, she plays dodge-ball and kickball. When engaged in any of these activities, Nina says, "I get really excited."

Like, I was riding my bike with my friend the other day, and . . . I was just flying down the street. She's like, "Where are you going?" I'm like, "I'm just riding my bike." And she couldn't keep up with me. So, I get excited, and I just feel really good and happy when I do stuff that I haven't done in a long time, or just something that I want to do.

Similarly, when it is a "free day" in her gym class, Nina will choose to engage in some type of physical activity, rather than sit and chat with her friends. She indicated that she will run and jump solely for the thrill they bring.

Like I ran across the gym the other day and just went flying up into the air. Just jumped and went flying. And everybody was like, "Why did you do that?" "I don't know. I just felt like it." It was a free day, and I'll just run around. Everybody, like, if we have a free day, everybody will just sit there and talk, and [the teacher's] like "Move around and do something." So they'll jump rope and talk to each other. But I'll jump rope and I'll run around the gym while I'm doing it. And so, I just like to move around more than some people do.

Furthermore, Nina seems to especially esteem other individuals who are energetic and enthusiastic. In describing one of her favorite teachers, she emphasized the "high energy" theme. Nina also appreciated the fact that this teacher would allow students up from their desks and permit them to move about the room. "And when we're walking, we sort of bounce around the room a little bit. She doesn't mind."

At school, Nina enjoys "anything that involves a lot of body movement," especially acting. Even her drawings have "lots of action going on." In contrast, one of her teachers observed that "she doesn't like activities that are passive for too very long." While noting that Nina can be slightly boisterous at times and "a little bit outspoken," her Writer's Lab instructor maintained that this was not obnoxious. Chuckling, she declared that she would always remember Nina for her exuberant and flamboyant body language. "You know, she just sort of bops along and 'Hey! Miss [Z].'"

Playfulness

A second theme, closely related to the first, centers on Nina's playfulness. The teacher of the computer class highlighted this trait as "her spark."

When I think of Nina, I smile. It's just . . . she's happy . . . there's a twinkle in her eye. There's a mischief to her that's — I call it a spark, because it's not really a mischief. But, Nina will tease me back as much as I can tease her. She has the maturity and the ability to understand the twist on things, and appropriately does it back. So, it's kind of that . . . well, I will smile when I think of her. It's sort of the charm that she has.

It seems that nearly everything that Nina does is “for fun” and personal pleasure. Time and again this strand would reemerge. These are some examples:

I'm like, “Patrick, wonder if we can fly?” And he's like, “Fly!” And I'm like, “Yeah!” So we both grabbed a bunch of leaves in our hands and we went over to my grandma's porch. And we'd run off the porch, and we'd jump. And we'd go like this. [Flails arms.] And we couldn't fly. But it was fun.

I started to think about how much I was missing by not riding my bike, because it was so fun. I could get around so fast.

We had found like this little fortress in these trees. And I figured out a way to rig it so that the person inside could lift a couple of the branches and see who was out there before letting them in, in a way that wasn't noticeable. I figured out how to do that, and I thought that was really creative. That was really fun.

My cousin and I had made seesaws out of tree branches and stuff. And that's fun. Of course, they always broke. But it was fun.

This sense of enjoyment appears to carry across to school-related activities. For example, in relating her experience of making a totem pole for a class project, Nina affirmed, “That was really fun, especially fun.” Upon stating that she would some day like to take a class in gymnastics, Nina added, “because I just think that would be fun.” The coordinator of the gifted program noted that Nina would often choose to use her free time at school to create original origami designs from paper. Although she has subsequently received positive feedback from her friends for these designs, the coordinator believed that the original motive was purely based upon the personal pleasure that she derived from the creative act.

In a similar vein, Nina's father suggested that his daughter was creative because the creative experience was simply “satisfying to her.” He recalled a “flip book” which Nina had recently created.

She did one that was very elaborate with people somersaulting and balls bouncing and birds flying. And it was really quite the undertaking. And she did it because it was fun. It wasn't a project or anything. She just decided that she wanted to do it.

Nina seemed to agree. In explaining why she tried to do things in a creative way, she declared, "It's more fun if you do it so it looks just like, like with it's own little twist."

Purpose

It's weird, because some people come home and they don't know what they want to do, and so they will look around until they find something that they want to do. But with me, I know. All the time, I know if I want to ride my bike, or if I want to skateboard. I know what I want to eat always. I know what I want to drink. And sometimes, when I can't decide what to do, I think about what I've done lately and what I haven't done. And I just pretty much do what I like to do that I haven't done.

Nina's life seems to be driven by purpose, and by its related constructs—focus, intensity, concentration, involvement, and persistence. As a result, Nina is rarely, if ever, bored. The coordinator of the gifted program observed, "I've never seen her bored at recess, or bored at anything. You know, in some kids you can see that, as bright as they can be, they want someone to do something for them. She doesn't. She seems very much to entertain herself."

Her father agreed:

[Nina] rarely gets bored. When she has something set in her mind that she wants to do and she may not be able to do whatever it is that she wants to do, then she may say, "I'm bored. I don't have anything to do." And if I ignore her, in a while she is involved in something—completely involved in something. To the point where I have to make sure that everything is OK, because things may be so quiet that you wonder what's going on.

Nina explained the situation this way, "I don't get bored that easily, because I'll sit somewhere. At first I'll get bored, but then I start thinking about things. And one thing leads to another. So I'm not bored for very long, luckily for me."

When purposefully engaged in an activity, Nina does seem to become very intent and absorbed. Her lab instructor described her as "very task oriented." Similarly, her father noted that once Nina has something set in her mind that she

wants to do, she will “get really involved. . . . And once she gets involved in something, you might as well let her go.” He explained that this intense involvement was not limited to a particular set of activities.

Nina can get involved in counting pennies, or she can get involved in a Game Boy game and be completely unaware that she’s been spoken to—she’s so involved in it. And she’ll do the same thing when she’s working on a project. She loves to do little creative things, especially for her friends. For Valentine’s day, she went to the store and bought some candy, and came back and made little packets. . . . Kind of a simple thing, but she spent 45 minutes putting together her little packages. And had no interest in whatever else may have been going on about her. She was completely absorbed in it. She has even gotten to the point where she does this with her school work.

Perhaps in no other area is the commitment to purpose seen so vividly as in Nina’s personal resolve to be creative. When asked if she intended to be creative, Nina emphatically replied, “Yes! I want to be creative!” When queried as to the motivating factors that she thought might make people creative, she answered:

Wanting to be creative. If somebody didn’t want to be creative, they wouldn’t have to. You don’t have to be creative, and that’s very important. Because I don’t just go out and say and do something and be creative if I don’t want to. . . . But I want to be creative in the first place, so anyway. You’ve gotta learn how to be creative, I think. You’ve gotta find the creativity and use it.

Confidence

Nina is confident—radiating self-assurance regarding her ideas, abilities, and values. As one of her teachers stated, “She seems to be comfortable in her own skin.” Similarly, the coordinator of the gifted program remarked that Nina “has a great deal of confidence in what she can do. She projects that.”

Repeatedly throughout the interviews, Nina would, in fact, contrast her perceptions with those of others, holding her own impression in positive relief

Somebody could say something and use more intense and descriptive words, and it would be more creative. This is just my opinion. This is not everybody’s opinion, just mine.

Everybody says I am, but I don’t think I’m a very good artist.

I don’t get in big fights with Seth, but my mom might say that I do. But I don’t think I do.

[My friend] says that [the teacher's] been with me the same as she has with everybody else. But I think she's been nicer to me.

Some people say that I'm really smarter than them, but I don't agree.

Nina also appears to be confident and quite comfortable with her system of values and beliefs. Her writing instructor observed, "She has a pretty strong sense of right and wrong. . . and definitely has a value system in place that she'll defend." The gifted coordinator agreed that Nina clearly possessed the "ability to defend her opinions." An illustration of this self-confidence in personal beliefs surfaced in a brief essay that Nina wrote for her Literacy Passport Program Test:

One day I was walking to school when I overherd [sic] some kids talking about one of my friends. They said she was mean and lied to them, they said she hit them and made them work for her.

I didn't think that was fair so I went over to them and asked them why they were saying that. They said they were saying that because it was true.

I asked them if she had ever lied, hit, or made them work for her. They said she hadn't. I asked them if they had ever seen her do it to anybody else. They said they hadn't.

I asked them again why they said that about her. This time they said they must have been made [sic] or something.

Nina's self-confidence has yielded positive ramifications. One of her teachers, for example, noted that Nina is able to relate "very comfortably" with adults, "without any discomfort that I'm a grownup and that she's a kid." She added, however, that Nina still maintains the proper "kid/adult respect." Her writing instructor elaborated on Nina's confidence in her interactions with teachers and other adults.

She talks with adults in a very mature way, but not a know-it-all kind of way. She really just can engage an adult in conversation very easily, and knows the right kind of things to say. So she seems comfortable with many ages and people.

Among her peers, Nina's self-confidence has tended to place her frequently in leadership roles. On several occasions, her teachers referred to Nina's strengths as a group leader. The Writer's Lab teacher, in fact, commented wryly that "regardless of whether she's doing it well or doing it incompetently, [Nina] always emerges as a leader."

Another benefit of Nina's self-confidence is found in her capacity for imparting support and affirmation rather than seeking to obtain it. The coordinator of the gifted program, for instance, expressed her belief that Nina "has so much confidence in her talents, that she doesn't need a constant affirmation of them. So she can give to others and not have to take it all when they're working in a group." Her lab instructor agreed that Nina "already feels affirmed in what she believes." The instructor also recalled a time just a couple of days previously when Nina had personally nurtured her as an adult.

One time last week, I had this trip to the museum. It always stresses me out. . . . And some kid asked me a question, and I said, "I can't deal with that right now, I've got the museum trip today!" And then Nina was on the way to lunch, and she said, "Miss [Z], don't get stressed about the museum." You know, it was just like an adult, like a colleague would have said to me in the hall.

On occasion, however, Nina's self-assurance has resulted in less desirable situations. At times, for example, Nina's confidence has led her to disregard her teachers' advice. The instructor of the computer course spoke about one other more recent projects.

You know, she's not one that because the teacher said it, that's the way it's going to be. She will hang with what she believes is the better way to go. . . . Like this conveyor belt or the people mover, I didn't think that it was going to work the way they did it. And I tried to tell them that I didn't think that it was going to work. Thought it was getting too fancy. I thought some of the problems they were going to have were going to happen. [But] they didn't want to hear that from me.

A more troublesome scenario, however, seems to erupt from time to time in the context of Nina's interactions with her classmates. When asked in an interview what she might do if her idea was different from that of her friends, Nina responded dramatically:

I say, "My idea! My idea! My idea!" Um . . . I'm getting better at this, but I wasn't too great at taking other people's ideas. But usually, I won't say, "I'm not going to listen to your idea, because mine is better than yours. I don't care what yours is." I'll listen to their idea. And if I don't like it, I'll tell them that I don't really love it. I'm not going to say, "I don't like it because mine is better than yours." I'll say, "I just don't really like that idea, so can we think of something. . . ."

Her teachers have observed the problem. The lab instructor noted, "Sometimes the interpersonal things have kept her from being the best leader she

could be—as far as feeling that she knows best, and has very strong opinions.” Similarly, the coordinator of the gifted program commented:

She’s so enthusiastic that sometimes she forgets who she’s working with, sort of. And just kind of goes, and has left people behind. And they feel like their ideas have been rejected. It’s not what Nina’s meant to do, at all. But she sometimes just needs to slow down in that enthusiasm.

While delineating that Nina had at times become frustrated when “her views aren’t leading the group,” her writing teacher recalled a particular incident:

And I’ll also remember the time when she was involved in that video project, and she and some other kids just couldn’t get along. I’ll remember, not that it was all her fault—it was a combination of strong personalities. I’ll remember her fuming, and storming around, and stomping. But, you know, it was also cracking me up at the same time. It was not like she’s evil. It’s just that she’ll remind me of a strong personality, both positively and negatively.

Nina’s father similarly remarked that his daughter “tended to be a little dictatorial.” Nevertheless, he maintained that she was beginning to develop tolerance for the ideas of others, perhaps because she had been “working with some people that had good ideas that let her know that other people had good ideas besides herself.” Her teachers seemed to agree that Nina was maturing in this regard. The Writer’s Lab teacher remarked, “I’ve seen a lot of progress in her tolerance for other views.” Referring to a recent project, the computer instructor observed, “Really, this partnership that she had in the last project was probably her best, in that they worked much more as a team than they have before. So, I think, she’s really growing in this area.” Nina, herself, seems to be finding value in the partnership of ideas.

I like to put our ideas together. That’s what I really like to do. . . . [My friend] wanted to do an escalator for our LOGO project. But I wanted to do something where the little guy would go under and it would beep. And so what we did was we made a people mover at the airport that the guy went under the thing and it beeped. Of course, it . . . never ended up working, but it was fun to put it together. And we made a better project.

Introspection

In Nina’s case, the theme of introspection seems to be an emerging strand. “When I was younger,” Nina reminisced, “I didn’t think about myself. . . . All I

thought about when I was little was having fun.” By the time the data for this study was collected, however, Nina appeared to have become considerably more reflective and metacognitive. Various evidences appeared throughout the interviews with Nina.

Like, I was riding my bike with my friend the other day, and I hadn't ridden it in awhile. And she's like, “Man! You haven't ridden your bike in awhile.” And I'm like, “No, I haven't.” And I started to think about how much I was missing by not riding my bike, because it was so fun.

I like instruments. I regret greatly that I didn't decide to play an instrument.

Last year we had to do a report on something that was Native American. And I made this. . . . Personally, I think. . . I don't mean to brag if I am. I'm really worried about bragging. I don't like to brag. Sometimes I do, and I don't realize it. But, um . . . I made this really cool totem pole out of paper mâché.

I don't think that anybody totally, absolutely hates me. Except maybe a couple of people. But, it's not my fault. It's just their personal opinion. At least I hope that it's not my fault.

I'll say something—and I think that I'm doing it right now—but I'll say something, and I won't know how to say it. But then afterwards I'll think of the perfect thing to say, and I'll just sum it up in a few words. And, there was no reason for me to say all that junk I said before. But, it's not like you can change the past. . . . See, just like right now. Right now I shouldn't have said all that junk. I just should have said what I just said.

Some of Nina's moments of introspection seem to be on the run. “Like if I'm riding my bike, I'll get off my bike, get on roller blades, and then when I'm roller blading around I'll think, ‘Man! That was fun riding my bike!’ But I'm on roller blades now, so I start thinking about that.” At other times, however, Nina takes a more contemplative and pensive approach.

Sometimes, I'll just sit somewhere, and I'll just be thinking. I won't be looking at anything. I'll just be thinking. And I don't think about, like, I'm happy or that was fun. I just think about things like totally, totally out of it. Like, at play or recess, if I don't have anything to do—everybody's got the computers, and everybody's doing a game that I don't want to play—I'll just sit on the steps and go [chin in hands] and

stare up at the sky, and think about. . . . Sometimes I'll think about Hershey and Nestle [pet ferrets]. And they are three miles away. And I haven't thought about them all day. And I'll just start thinking about something.

Nina's introspective thinking seems to have evolved from her own experience, from her parents' encouragement, and from school-related activities. When Nina was in kindergarten, for example, she would sometimes say to another child, "You little meany!" and walk away. Then, when that child would be upset with her, she would reflect, "Oh no! I wish that I hadn't said that." As Nina would later recall, "I thought a lot about how I could be nicer to my friends when I was little, because . . . when I wasn't nice to somebody, I'd feel bad, and I'd try to think of how I could make them feel better or why."

Nina believes, however, that her increasing reflection has largely been the result of her parents' insistence.

My parents really got me into this "Why did you do that?" thing. Because, they're like, "Go to your room and think about why you did that." And I'm like, "I'm not going to think about why I did that. I'm not gonna." And when I get on my bed, I'm like, "Why did I do that?" And I'd think about why I did it, and how I'd control myself and not do it again.

Certain school activities also fostered introspective thought. Nina used a class assignment as an illustration. The teacher had asked students to write a paragraph about a time when they were not a good friend to someone, and Nina had remembered an incident that involved her younger brother.

He worked for a long time on this picture and it ripped. And I told him to "Get out of my face," because I was doing my homework, and I couldn't figure out this problem, or something like that. And now, I wish that I hadn't done that. So. . .

The teachers in Nina's gifted program also seem to have encouraged goals of reflection and introspection. In her case, the gifted coordinator noted that "one of the areas that she's really working on is reflecting." Furthermore, she reported that "much growth" had occurred in this area, even just since the previous year, and that this aspect had now become one of Nina's strong assets.

Uniqueness

The final theme, and perhaps one of the most consistent and robust, focuses on Nina's perception of self as unique and creatively different.

At the first interview, Nina offered, “Some people would take this as an insult, but I take it as a compliment. I’m weird. I’m just different.” It appears, in fact, that Nina enjoys her uniqueness. Referring to her attire, for example, she stated, “I like clothes that are a little different.” Nina also wears her hair at waist length, explaining, “I like having long hair. I don’t think I could live with short hair, because everybody’s got short hair. And so, I want to be different and have long hair.”

Nina’s uniqueness, however, goes beyond externals, involving her approach to school and to life in general.

I don’t act like everybody else. I mean, most of the people that I know that are as smart as me—I don’t mean to put anybody down—are more straight forward and more controlled. But I’m sort of more, just go with the wind. If I lose something, I lose something. Who cares! And. . . I don’t do stuff like everybody else does, and I don’t act like everybody else does.

In the classroom, for example, Nina does not see herself as reacting in the same way that other students do. She explained it in this way:

I’m just really different. Because some people will sit somewhere, and they’ll look at the board, and they’ll do exactly what the teacher says. And I’ll be sitting there, like, “Well, this is great. Very interesting. Yes, that’s great. Huh.” And then I’ll write it down.

It is in the arena of creativity, however, that Nina sees herself as most unique. “Everybody says like how you look or how you think is what makes you different from other people, but that’s not all. I mean, creativity is what makes you different.” She further explained that it is the amount of creativity that a person utilizes that makes that individual unique. This was the case in her own life, Nina observed. “I know some people who don’t use too much creativity, and they’re also cool. But I’m different from them because I use more creativity and so my stuff is different.” Although Nina does not view herself as “really, really creative,” she nevertheless remarked that “since I’m so different and odd compared to other people—and this does not make me feel bad by saying this, I think that I am a little more creative than some.”

Nina continued to develop these ideas of difference and uniqueness when asked to discuss creativity at large.

[Creativity] is when there are normal things all around, but you just change them slightly to make it just a little bit different, or you have something that's just totally different. It's like an idea that hasn't been used before. . . . Creativity makes the world interesting. If nothing was creative, then everything would just be bland and boring. And everything would just be like perfectly squared out, just the way it is. But with creativity, everything you'd have would have a little bit of a twist. It's different.

As a case in point, Nina noted that in her artwork she attempts to make her drawing look "different from what it would really look like." This has not always been the case, however.

When I was little and I tried to draw something, I wanted it to look exactly how it really looked. And then when I got into school, there were kids who really didn't care how it looked. They just wanted to have fun and so I started doing that. . . . I realized that it doesn't matter if it really looks like the thing. It's more fun if you do it so it looks just like, like with its own little twist. So it looks just a little bit different.

By the end of the final interview, however, Nina had moved beyond artwork and school, and had embedded, in fact, her "uniqueness" motif of creativity into the broad panorama of life itself

Life is different because of creativity. Without creativity, life would be boring and bland. Creativity helps me to enjoy life because it makes me more flexible and enthusiastic. It just makes a more interesting life.

Synthesis and Discussion

Nina, a sixth-grade student, is both a highly able and creatively gifted child. Throughout the course of this qualitative study, a number of important life themes have emerged, congruent in many instances with findings that have been reported in the literature.

1. Nina brings energy and enthusiasm to each of her activities, both academic and extracurricular. This trait may be indicative of high levels of internal motivation and of an active response to challenge (Purkey, 1978; Werner & Smith, 1982; Werner & Smith, 1992; Whitmore, 1986). It may further relate to her development of personal resiliency (Cowen & Work, 1988; Masten, Best, & Gamezey, 1991; Werner, 1984).

2. Nina exhibits playfulness, and seems to engage in a wide array of experiences for the sake of personal pleasure. This characteristic is in harmony with research findings from resilient gifted populations (e.g., Clasen, 1993; Giffin, 1992; Margolin, 1994). Werner (1984, 1990), for example, has noted that resilient gifted children are more likely to seek out new situations and less likely to evidence fear in the face of the unknown.
3. While Nina appears overall to be strongly goal-oriented, one of her most salient purposes is seen in her resolve to be creative. Creative self-expression, in fact, seems to be intrinsically rewarding to gifted students in general (Purkey, 1978; Gardner, 1983). Furthermore, a sense of control and a commitment to self appear to be vital factors in adolescent hardiness (Bandura, 1997; Bernard, 1991). These dimensions have apparently coalesced in Nina's personal goal to be a creative individual.
4. Nina radiates confidence regarding her ideas, abilities, and values. This observation aligns with research findings that indicate that resilient gifted children tend to be self-reliant (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985; Werner, 1984) and have a strong sense of personal independence (Eriksson, 1990; Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). While the trait of personal confidence has brought many positive ramifications—especially in the academic realm (Colangelo & Brower, 1987; Ross & Parker, 1980), it has also posed at times certain difficulties for Nina, particularly in her relationships with her peers. At the time of the study, however, the interpersonally abrasive aspect of Nina's self-confidence appeared to be on the wane.
5. An emerging strand in Nina's life seems to be that of introspection. Quite frequently, Nina gave evidences of reflection and metacognition. This finding is in harmony with the reports of other studies of gifted individuals (e.g., Davidson, 1986; Lovecky, 1993; Piechowski, 1991; Ristow, 1988). Piechowski, for example, noted a greater intensity of feeling and a greater self-awareness. This evidence seems to hold particularly true in the case of resilient youth—self-understanding having been identified as one of the crucial factors that buffers stress reactions in individuals (Beardslee, 1989; Damon & Hart, 1982).
6. One of the strongest themes emergent from this study is the concept that Nina views herself as a unique person, as "different." This perspective is due, at least in part, to the fact that she believes that she is a creative person and that

creativity makes an individual different from other people. While children in general begin to develop their own identity as they learn to differentiate themselves from the larger social system, it seems that gifted children may experience “a pervasive sense of differentness from other children” (Janos, Marwood, & Robinson, 1985, p. 46; also Higham & Buescher, 1987). A study of highly intelligent elementary school children, for example, found that 37% of the children saw themselves as significantly different from their peers (Janos, Fung, & Robinson, 1985). This, indeed, seems to be the case for Nina.

Projections

Looking to the future, Nina is sure that she wants to attend college. “I want to go to [the university] definitely.” In terms of a career, however, she was somewhat more ambivalent.

I’m not sure—I can’t decide if I want to be an architect, like my dad, or a math teacher. Because last year I got the notion to be a teacher, because the science class was really cool. And then this year, math is really cool. And I realized that I am better at math than I am in science. I am better in math than I am in anything else. And so, I can’t decide between those two yet. I might teach architecture at [the university]. That’s a good one!

At school, her Writer’s Lab teacher could picture her as a journalist, a lawyer, or “heading up her own business.” She further observed that her career would most likely be “something very people-oriented.” While expressing her belief that Nina would be designated at the high school level “for special awards, special honors, special programs like the Governor’s School” and that clearly “she is going to finish college,” the coordinator of the gifted program also formulated a hope that Nina would have “a career where her creativity can be tapped.”

Nina’s father stated that he didn’t “want to dream” for his daughter, but that he hoped that she would think for herself, challenge herself, and be happy. “Just as long as what she does makes her happy. And she feels fulfilled. You can’t ask for anything more.” Noting that it did not seem to take much to make his daughter happy, he also shared his own belief that happiness “doesn’t come with possessions. It comes with connections—relating to other people or to what you do. Being happy with what you do.”

Nina, herself, appears to have adopted this “happiness” frame of reference. When asked to describe how she might know if she were successful in life, she replied, “I think I’d know if I were successful like if I got paid enough to get by and not have to borrow money from my parents. And if I was happy. Well, not only happy, but also content.”

Regardless of what the future holds for Nina, one thing is highly probable. Given the present trend in her life, Nina will be someone who is creatively different.

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