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This I Believe: The Do-Over

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This I Believe: The Do-Over

Meredith Doench, Centerville, Ohio
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[This I Believe Inc.](#) was founded in 2004 as an independent, not-for-profit organization that engages youth and adults from all walks of life in writing, sharing, and discussing brief essays about the core values that guide their daily lives. Professor Doench's essay can be [found online >>>](#) along with the essays of thousands of other contributors.

I believe in second chances. Even thirds. There's nothing like the power of a sincere do-over.

As a junior and senior high student, school was never my forte. It wasn't for lack of effort on my parents' part—my mother had been a fourth grade teacher and my father, a doctor, worked hard to keep me in one of the best districts in our area. Still, I bucked most school activities. Study groups? No way. Extra-curriculars? Not unless my friends were doing it. Math club? Please!

My junior year I fell into an anxious depression so severe, I required hospitalization. All I wanted was to sleep but my racing mind didn't allow for rest. My kaleidoscope eyes—that's what I called it—the ever-churning landscape before me that moved so quickly, I never had a clear focus on anything. The result? Everything of an equal, blurry confusion. I was as confounded about what to watch on television as I was about how to approach a biology quiz.

Doctors warned my parents not to expect much: "You'll be lucky if she graduates from high school." The dark waters of depression eddied around me, rising higher and higher until I could barely keep my head above water. Exhaustion overwhelmed me from my violent tread that led nowhere fast.

It only took a moment's kindness to help turn things around. A staff member found a book for me somewhere on the unit: Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*.

"You're stuck here," he told me, handing over the book. "Might as well learn new ways to keep yourself occupied."

Dust drifted from the book's spine when I cracked it open. This book, I already knew, wasn't going to be for me, but I promised to give it a try. By page ten, I'd been pulled out of my chaotic world and into Huxley's. My kaleidoscope eyes subsided and the white noise diminished. My focus sharpened.

One night, lying in my hospital bed unable to sleep, I understood that I wanted to do what Huxley could: transport others out of their troubled worlds even if only for a little while. I wanted to write.

I'm one of the lucky ones. I got the chance to do-over my education. After skidding through high school, I entered community college at the remedial level.

I'm currently a lecturer of writing. My love of words and their meanings has led me through undergraduate, masters, and PhD programs. Like a painter's palate, my words color journal after napkin scribble after margin note: writing is breath. Although dark waters still churn around my knees, I've grown stronger and writing helps keep depression at bay.

I can't imagine what do-over number I'm on now. Sometimes, though, I can't help but wonder where I'd be if no one at the hospital had taken the time to find that book. What if no one had offered me another chance? I'm willing to bet those dark waters would have swallowed me whole.