

## Stars & Fire—Unconventional Educations

It was a mild summer night, the stars in the cloudless sky glistened like diamonds. My father held me in his arms, our necks craned upwards, as he pointed out the many constellations and planets piercing the darkness. On Sundays, the New York Times came with a star chart, a map of the stars in the sky on that day, and we would pour over it together, him explaining what I could not understand. It was my father who bought me my first astronomy book and who helped me with the big words. It was my father who fueled my imagination and encouraged my endless fascination with our universe, all outside of school.

Tara Westover, author of *Educated*, has had similar experiences with friends and family, ones during which the learning occurred outside of the classroom. Take, for example, Shawn's burns. Tara acted with an unprecedented level of urgency and dedication in order to preserve his life. She was quick on her feet, cleverly submerging his injured body in water to keep him stable until her mother came home to properly take care of him. In this situation, an atypical type of learning (in this case, learning how to stabilize an injured patient) occurred—one in which the learning happened through personal experience instead of studying vocabulary terms or mathematical formulas, a more impersonal type of learning. The benefits of this personal style of learning are staggering; seeing as they were influential and memorable enough for Westover to include in her memoir, this demonstrates the long-term efficacy of hands-on, experience-driven learning that arises from a feeling of necessity instead of a feeling of obligation, which I believe most students this day and age can attest to. I certainly believe that in this way the students of the University of Delaware can follow in Westover's footsteps and create more impactful lessons using this hands-on approach.

Education does not occur solely in the classroom. While valuable in its own right, formal education often lacks a personal element that drives home the lesson, that solidifies it in the minds of the learner. The classroom is mostly impersonal, with one class similar to the next and no notable elements to distinguish one from another. Education outside school, however, can happen anywhere, at anytime, and often arises naturally from the experience in that place. For example, I could be hiking with my family and the conversation would naturally flow to, say, the flowers. We could talk about their relationships to the environment, or how flowers are structured, or the type of flower, all outside of the classroom. In this way, learning is welcome and, most importantly, naturally connected to daily experience. As a result of this, I'm reminded of the nights spent staring at the starry sky and know the most valuable education often happens when we do not even realize we are learning.