No Soccer For Us

The penetrating summer heat beats down on the freshly oiled, black pavement. It is by all standards a perfect day. Children frolic every which way and tired teachers are happy that it is finally recess. Two young children sit on the rugged, cement steps outside of Mrs. Clements fifth grade classroom. Anyone observing this scene would ask, “Why are those kids not playing or running around? It is such a nice day outside, why are they just sitting there?”

The truth is, Chris and I are, in fact, playing. We are playing in a way that is different from our classmates. Both hunched over, brows furrowed over an old, tattered green notebook.

“What should we have him do now?” Exclaimed the younger boy Chris.

“I think he should build a spaceship and attack some aliens!” I replied.

For almost the entire fifth grade year, myself and my friend Chris Dorious had sat on our teachers steps writing stories. I’m glad we did, or “Black Jack” would never have been created. He would have stayed an undeveloped idea in our fresh, creative minds.

Black Jack was the fifth grade equivalent of the modern James Bond. He could do anything, and I mean anything. He could drive flashy, red speed boats away from the “bad guys.” He could be riding a camel in the blazing heat of the Egyptian desert one minute, and the next be snowboarding down an icy, treacherous Mt. Everest to save a damsel in distress. The only thing that could destroy Jack was our lack of imagination, thus he was invincible.

I don’t remember why my young friend and I decided to start writing. I’m not sure why at nine years old, running in the blistering summer heat did not appeal to us. All I know is that we had been given a new, unopened set of colored gel pens, and we were intent upon using them. Black Jack became everything we wanted to become. He became everything we saw in movies, televisions, and even our own fathers. He was not an assignment given by a teacher, he was ours.

Writing and creating things of this nature at such a young age, became something I cherished. It allowed me to not see writing as something boring or mundane, but the exact opposite. It became my way to travel to the moon in a homemade spaceship, attract girls to like me, although I didn’t understand exactly why that was appealing at nine years old, and become the toughest Cadillac driving, money making, good looking dude on the playground.

I don’t remember any of my traditional writing assignments from my earlier years. I’m sure I did them without much fuss, unconcerned with the quality; but with Black Jack, I was concerned. Oh how I was careful and sure that what we wrote about him wasn’t just quality, it was “cool.”

Black Jack has since passed on and new characters and ideas have taken his place. It wouldn’t be too difficult to revive him from the dust though; perhaps he still has more stories to tell.

It wasn’t a teacher encouraging me to write, it wasn’t my parents and heck, it wasn’t even the prospect of getting money for good grades. It was the untold stories in two young boy’s brilliant minds that needed to be told.

I must give credit to my friend Chris as well. It was a combination of sitting down with my best friend, using new gel pens, and taking deep breaths of the sweet summer air that allowed me to develop a mutual friendship and respect with what we call writing.

“Hey do guys want to come play soccer?” Said a boy, red faced and out of breath, as he came running up to us. I turn my head slightly to read the facial expression of Chris, and immediately upon seeing his face I know my response.

“Hey Colton, that sounds like fun, but no soccer for us today.” Colton quickly took a second or two to consider this, his chubby cheeks red as a cherry.

“Ok, whatever. Maybe you guys can play with us tomorrow.” And with that, he ran back into the throng of playing children, unscathed by our rejection.

Even though we were children, we understood something vitally important. Soccer was fun, but it could never produce the colorful, decorative world our young minds craved. Writing became our treasure map to that new, exciting world, and we never looked back.