

“Once upon a time.”

The four words that is the start of the beginning, middle, and end of every fairy tale story. But when I was younger it was these four words that felt like the start of my own doom. When the teacher would tell me to read those words and more out to the class I just sat there and stared. I couldn't read those four words, but I could sense they were there taunting me, laughing at my struggle. No matter how hard I tried I could never even get past the beginning let alone the middle or end. But then with time I was able to read those four words and so much more. From sentences, to paragraphs, and from paragraphs to chapters I was able to read without the taunting of those words. And now surprisingly one of the things I love to do is read, so much so that once I pick a book up, I can't put it down, until I'm done. I guess that Once upon a time had a happy ending after all.

Yet here I am with another “Once upon a time,” but in an entirely new form, but I'll never forget the feeling those four words gave me. It all began with my very first class in college: Honors Single Variable Calculus. Funny, another four words that seem to do so much more than identify something, I guess I should've taken it as a sign, but I continued on into the class. As the teacher explained I could feel myself begin to panic completely, I couldn't even begin to understand what was happening. None of it made sense. At the time we were talking about induction and how to prove using addition, and never has a simple $1+1$ felt so impossible. I would hang onto the teachers every word but all I seemed able to hear was my rising panic that I couldn't understand a single thing that was happening. I didn't understand why we had to prove that 5 didn't equal 2 or even how we would prove that. To me it seemed pretty obvious that 5 didn't equal 2 but the others seemed to see the hidden message that I never even received, and furiously wrote on their notebooks. I on the other hand could only sit there and stare at the question and wonder where why this was a question. Once again, I was confronted with a beginning, middle, and end that I didn't even know how to begin.

“Once upon a time,” I believed in numbers but now it seems that that belief is wrong. Then this new story grew a plot twist and expanded its vocabulary with the word's axioms, definition, successor, bijection, and sets, and it felt like the entire story was getting out of hand. Even if I understood the concepts when it would get to the questions asked in class I could only sit there and stare in complete shock and panic that nothing I understood was being written on the board. When it came to actually proving something I could only pray that what I was writing was enough because I couldn't even comprehend what it actually meant to “prove,” something in the way that was expected from me.

I tried once again to learn the content, and I watched this one video on union and intersections with my friend who was also in the class and wanted to review the content. And as we watched the video, we would explain the topics to each other and for once I understood what was happening, and I was able to apply it to the homework that we had. “Once upon a time,” I had finally gotten past just the beginning. Union and intersection became my favorite topic in the class because I was able to follow the logic of the problems that were set before me, and I would look forward to the “once upon a time,” that would bring those problems to me.

But although I was able to get this one “once upon a time,” I know that there are still plenty more to come. I think something that I would need is just time on each of the topics, and for them to be explained to me one on one. I’m new to this kind of story and I don’t know much but I want to keep learning the beginning, middles, and ends of the four words that makes up this class, “Honors Single variable Calculus,” because “once upon a time,” I began knowing one way of mathematics but I now have an opportunity to learn another, and I know that with time I will not only know the “once upon a time,” but the “happily ever after.”