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The Good ol’ Days

It is hard to remember how exactly I learned to read and write. But as I reflect, it is clear to see why I loved reading and writing when I was little and why now, as an adult, they are not my favorite things to do. Reading and writing were a way I could show off what I was learning in school to my parents and grandparents. I could come home and read them a story I had learned and my family would be so happy for me. Now, I am forced to read different materials in school, readings I would never be excited to go home and tell my parents about.

I have lived in the same house since I was born. I have three sisters and a mom and a dad. My family has always been very close and part of that is because of the bonding time we all had together when I was little. When I was in kindergarten and even before that, my sisters and I would so look forward to bedtime. This was not because we would get to shut our eyes after a long day, but because we would get to each pick out a book for our dad to read to us. We would make our dad read to us until he was on the verge of falling asleep. Of course, he had to come up with some way, other than reading *If You Give a Moose a Muffin* for the millionth time, to stay awake. To test us, he would mess up some part of the story, or change the ending. We would all get so mad and yell, “Come on dad, read it right!” This is such a great memory that I have of learning to read as a kid, and now that I think about it, my dad’s “switch-it-up” technique really worked. Memorization is probably the one thing I remember doing that helped my comprehension in reading the most. I was so excited to read and interested in the stories and at some point in my growing up, it has switched over.

Another fond memory I have of reading at a young age has to do with my grandma. My grandma lives in Alexandria, Minnesota, in a small town home by a lake. My sisters and I would always be ecstatic when our mom told us we were going to visit. I however, was the most excited because that meant I got to read with her. My grandma has tons of books, many of which I had memorized like my own books at home. My grandma would never get sick of reading to me and helping teach me to read like my parents often would. She even made me my own storybook, about Princess Emma. She made the words in the storybook dotted, that way I could outline them and learn to write my own story! In this way, my grandma was a huge part of my learning to read and my learning to write. I think it is because of her that even now I enjoy writing made-up stories.

The last thing I remember about literacy development when I was little is what I learned because of my preschool and kindergarten teachers. I remember learning the sounds of the letters more than how to actually write them. My mom still has these animal puppets that I made with animals that started with each letter of the alphabet (‘A’ for alligator, ‘B’ for bear, ‘C’ for cat, etc.). I hung them up on my door so I could practice the sounds and the animal names every day. My kindergarten and preschool teachers were very impactful in my learning how to read and write. Different activities like making puppets and writing short stories made it easy for me to enjoy writing and reading. I went to preschool three days a week for just on year, but whenever those three days of the week came I could not wait to get my hands on a book to read or a pencil to write with. Kindergarten was just half-day, but again, I could not wait to show my teachers what I had been practicing with my parents and sisters at home.

As I got older, in middle and high school, I began to not enjoy reading and writing as much as I had when I was little. However, in middle school I fondly remember having to read the book *Because of Winn-Dixie*. I began reading it, thinking it was going to be like every other book a teacher has forced me to read. But I could not put the book down. I even got my own copy after we were through reading it in class and read it over and over again. Up until that point in my life, I had not found a book that I loved or even liked. This gave me a little hope in terms of reading when it came to assignments from teachers in middle school.

In high school, I had the hardest teacher for AP Literature, or so I had heard from all my friends who had taken her the previous year. I was scared out of my mind because I knew I was not a very strong reader or writer. This teacher ended up being a huge impact in my literacy life. Although she would completely bash and criticize my papers, I learned so much from her because she never gave up on me, and in turn, I never gave up on myself as a writer. Having this teacher my senior year of high school was a huge turning point in my life and now I can say that I enjoy writing a little bit more than I ever have. She helped me grow as both a reader and a writer and I have no regrets when I look back at the fact that I stayed in the class and never gave up. I will never forget getting my final paper back at the end of the year with a smiley face on the top next to a red letter A! Thank you Mrs. Wood for teaching me how to read and write in a new way, and reminding me what it feels like to enjoy the two activities like I am in kindergarten again.

Clearly, my reading and writing experiences have changed over the years. From my early childhood experiences to my experiences in high school and as a young adult, I have learned that reading and writing will always be important. I can always learn something new having to do with literacy; so knowing my background is extremely helpful and useful. Reading and writing have been exciting for me, perceived as punishment, and finally are appreciated. This is all thanks to my dad, my grandma, and my AP Literature teacher. I would not be literate if it were not for these three people.