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 A peek into the story of my literacy

I grew up in a household without television and computers, but many, many books. My father had his doctorate in Philosophy and taught English for twenty-five years in Germany, so you can imagine how literate and knowledgeable he was. And he was almost always working on writing a book, which my mother would type out for him to correct using the only computer in the house.

I would have to say he had the greatest influence on my literacy growing up. While my little brothers and I were young, he would read to us every day; children’s books during the day, and at night, bedtime stories and chapter books for as long as I can remember until he got too sick to read to us anymore. I became an enormous bookworm as soon as I managed to read fluently. I would devour books; I remember reading the entire unabridged Sherlock Holmes mysteries around nine years old, and I can still open it randomly and know where I am.

I started by reading poems from children’s books, and continued with a list my Dad made of classics like The Secret Garden, Jungle Book, The Three Musketeers, and literature like that for years. Some books were harder than others, for example it was a struggle for me to finish David Copperfield, but as I mentioned before, Sherlock Holmes would have me intrigued for hours on end. I still think mystery stories and novels are my favorite, as opposed to textbooks, which take up most of my reading time today.

I was homeschooled for many years, and ironically did not read many of the books often read and taught during elementary school and middle school, but I caught up at the end of high school when I attended Walnut Hills. Kurt Vonnegut has strange tales, but I kind of enjoyed his books, and Shakespeare has a soft spot in my heart, partly because my father had such a love for him, and partly because my name was picked from his play *The Tempest*.

I loved to read and still love to read, but the activity has been tainted slightly from all the textbook reading that is required once high school and college start. However, required school reading has made me a much more interactive reader. I don’t read any school material without a highlighter anymore, and I’ve learned how to mark up books and not feel bad about it. I learned this in senior English class which I took junior year, and reinforced the habit during micro and macroeconomics in twelfth grade. Being a visual person anyway, marking up my reading has really helped, plus it makes it much more efficient when going back and rereading or reviewing the material.

Currently I don’t read very much outside of textbooks for school due to time, but I was given a Qur’an and am slowly working my way through that out of curiosity and also to educate myself and not perpetuate the many misconceptions circulating around Islam. It is a beautiful book, and much like other holy scripts can be very intense and dense during some passages and easier to process in other passages. It has the same basic stories and lessons as the Torah and the Bible mainly because it is believed to be the final version of the Holy Book given to mankind. The Qur’an is believed to be the clear words of God as dictated to his prophet Muhammad, whose miracle was that he could neither read nor write but was then able to write the verses of the Qur’an over the course of thirty some years. It surprised me to learn that Islam does not shun Judaism or Christianity because at one point in time that was the correct religion to follow, but Muslims believe that these religions have gone astray, and now Islam is now the correct religion to follow. The Qur’an even has a system of teaching, consisting of teaching a concept, telling the consequences of disobeying that concept and then giving an example in story form. This is the first time I’ve read something of this nature to such an intricate extent, and it is definitely a learning experience, both in knowledge and in reading itself.

Reading is fascinating, and in general amazing how the little black symbols on a page can completely captivate you and transport you to another world, or put you to sleep instantly, as is sometimes the case with textbooks, or dry scientific literature, or simply boring books written for pleasure reading.

Writing for me has a more recent beginning. I didn’t write much of my own stuff during grade school, mostly because notes were copied from what my parents prepared, and English was more about grammar, using short answer responses and not paper writing. Therefore I did not have much guidance on how to write proper essays, which I had to learn quickly upon entering high school. Writing – coming up with ideas and putting them on paper - has never been too difficult for me, however I have never had much confidence in my style or how I express my ideas. My confidence grew some with guidance in high school, and then during my senior year I took a semester long creative writing class, which was a wonderful experience. Both my Dad and his mother were fabulous poets, and I think that background came through to me during that class. I really liked my teacher, and he was very supportive and he made it fun. We wrote short stories and poems or came up with something from random, crazy prompts. I liked the prompts where we had to make a story based on an object someone brought, or a feeling, or I think my favorite – silence. Through those exercises and the comments and feedback we gave each other, my confidence grew. I love the stories I wrote and now I know I can write for pleasure and it is somewhat entertaining and sometimes even deep.

My style is usually descriptive and narrative - I feel like I write as I would talk to someone, and somehow it ends up working. However I am not flowery, so I can write what I need to say in less length than meets the page requirements, which is usually my challenge. I don’t really write anything for pleasure anymore, but I do try to keep a fairly updated journal, and journaling has helped me when times were tough. Somehow getting feelings or thoughts on paper helps to get them out of your head.

Having switched majors, I am slightly intimidated by the amount of papers I will have to generate from now on. I was in Electrical Engineering, which as a program requires almost no formal writing, and now am undecided but leaning towards business, where there are papers for marketing, law, research and so on. Even making this paper four pages long is a bit of an effort, but it is coming easier than is always dreaded in my head which is a relief. I am hoping to conquer my “fear” of starting papers, and just be able to generate them as needed this semester – if that is realistic. I also hope I can mature my style. It is sufficient, but I feel it could be better in the sophistication of sentence structure, how I express my ideas and the flow of the paper as a whole.

So all in all I love to read and don’t mind to write and strongly believe that both, along with the etiquette that comes with it, like grammar, and spelling - which in themselves seem to be a lost art sometimes – are extremely important in anyone’s education and should be cultivated much more than they are. I get so many looks of pity when I mention I am taking an English class, and it saddens me to hear so many groans from peers when they have to take an English class. It shouldn’t be a dread, but an appreciation of another form of communication with oneself, and the world, and almost a kind of art that everyone should at least be able to do, even if they don’t particularly love it. I heard in my Marketing class today that surveys should be written in a third grade reading level. I find it absolutely ridiculous that material has to be so simple for the general public to understand. And reading – I wish people did more of it, but it is extremely difficult to get people to read. There are so many worlds to explore when reading, so many alternate universes to let yourself be carried away into if this one is becoming too much. Maybe we can just hope for more people like Oprah to get people enthusiastic about reading.