Jessica Matalevich 9/17/14

Critical Writing 120

Growing Up Reading

 Think about your childhood. Maybe you think about running around outside with your friends playing tag, or dressing up and playing house. Maybe you remember watching Saturday morning cartoons or playing board games with your family. If you’re like me, you remember spending your night times reading with your parents. It seems as if these memories are all a thing of the past. Technology has overtaken the games of the pasts. Kids are glued to the TV and to their iPads. When kids hang out, they don’t play tag, they play video games and barely even speak to each other. Sometimes it seems like I grew up in the last generation of kids who knew what life was like outside of the internet, and whose parents took the time to sit down with them, read them the book, and give children the tools to become independent and learn about the world around them.

 I’ve always been a reader. The bookshelf I have in my childhood home is packed, overflowing with books from all different genres, and I would have to credit my parents for inspiring my love of reading. Every night I would pick out a book and me and my mom, and my dad if he had time, would sit on my bed a read a story. I quickly progressed to a higher reading level than what my age says I should be on, so by the time I was in first grade or so I had ditched the picture books and had moved on to the chapter books. I quickly became bored with the chapter books at that reading level, so my parents and I decided to move on to books like *A Series Of Unfortunate Events* and, of course, *Harry Potter*. This essay now risks turning into a super cliché from a millennial about how Harry Potter changed their life. This is not what I want to do, mostly because those books didn’t really “change my life.” It wasn’t like at the moment my mom started reading the book to me that my entire world changed. But the series was the first one I was extremely interested in, and the only series that I’m still a fan of today.

 The reason why I thought about Harry Potter immediately when I began this paper was because reading it with my parents brought me closer to them. Almost every night, from the time where I was probably 7 or 8 until the last book came out when I was 12 or so, my parents and me would sit down and read together. It took us forever to get through the books, since we only read one chapter a night, but we made it through, slowly but surely. It was my time that I had with my parents each day. I have two younger siblings, and we’re all four years apart, so things got hectic during the day, but I knew that every night I’d get to sit on my bed and hear my mom read me a book. It was our time to connect and spend some time away from my siblings, which I was clearly grateful for. Once Harry Potter ended, so did our nightly reading ritual. I was 12 or so, I was almost a teenager and was totally done with my parents and ready to take reading completely into my own hands.

 As I mentioned before, in elementary school, my reading level was higher than it was supposed to be. As I got into the higher grades in elementary school, I was done with the children’s section of the library. I was the rebel who ventured into the teen section when I wasn’t even in the 6th grade yet. By that I mean that I was extremely nervous about going into the teen room alone since I wasn’t a teen and made my mom go in with me. I really wasn’t much of a rebel at all.

Reading teen novels introduced me to a bunch of topics I hadn’t yet encountered as a tween. I remember reading the *Sisterhood Of The Traveling Pants* books and getting freaked out when one of the characters had sex and had a pregnancy scare. I was like 12 years old, I had never heard about these things before. At that point I’m pretty sure I thought you got pregnant from touching boys, and that’s not a joke. This is completely beside the point thought. The point is that through books I was exposed to things I wouldn’t have found out about for a few years. This put me far ahead of all my friends in the “dirty” knowledge department. I was the kid in middle who knew what all the slang terms meant and made fun of you if you wouldn’t curse. Needless to say books gave me a lot of knowledge.

 The cheesy teen girl books that I was so obsessed with also helped me mature in a more modest way too. Most of the books I read were focused on girls, told from the point of view of girls, and involved issues that I had encountered or that I wished I would encounter. Most of these books end up being about love and are focused on boys, but they also spent a lot of time talking about friendship and relationships with your family and other topics that weren’t as crush centric. Growing up, during middle school when I was reading most of these books, I’d been going through a lot of friend drama. I was shy and quiet and on my first day of middle school I went it with exactly four good friends. During middle school. I lost some friends and eventually made new ones. I always stressed out a lot about things like this, and in my mind every issue is the end of the world, I still think like that today. It was always comforting to come home and read a book about someone who has similar problems to me.

 Reading taught me so many valuable things about life. It helped me grow and mature in a way that I’m not sure I would have if I hadn’t read all those books. As a kid, reading was all about the family, and as I grew older, I became more independent. I learned to think critically about what I had read and how it applies to my own life. Nowadays, I don’t see kids getting the same things out of YouTube videos and iPad games. Kids aren’t gaining the knowledge about the world outside of themselves, about people and places that they aren’t exposed to. Parents aren’t inspiring that love of reading in kids, which I think will harm them in the long run. I’m not sure where I would be in my life if I hadn’t been reading thought out my childhood. Books helped me bond with my parents, and helped me learn in a way that I wouldn’t be able to otherwise. Although I’m severely slacking on the book reading front nowadays, my love of reading will never change, and it has forever shaped who I am. If only kids these days would see that.