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Writing Stories

As a child, there were very few times that I went to bed without reading, and I never traveled without having a book with me. I remember a time I was going to dinner with my family by boat. The boat ride was only five or ten minutes, but I was still completely immersed in my book. When my mom asked to take a picture of my siblings and me I didn't even hear her ask. Today, we still laugh when we see the picture of me sitting on my boat with my face in my book, not even aware that the picture was being taken. I loved reading stories, and at the same I was reading stories, I was also writing stories of my own in school. Even as child I had an interest in reading and writing stories, and it became what I was good at. I can even recall my first interest in reading stories. Being the first-born child, I required a lot of attention from my parents before settling down for bed. Every night, I would lay in bed while my parents read through every single book in my collection, but I was only able to turn pages, look at the pictures, and open the pop-up flaps. Throughout many years of schooling, I discovered that I like to tell stories. I enjoyed writing memoirs before I even knew what the term memoir was.

My earliest memory of creating my own stories started in elementary school. Each year we had to write and illustrate our own book. Each kid was given a brand new hard cover book that was completely blank. When we turned the book in, it was filled with the sloppy handwriting of an elementary school student and whatever silly pictures we decided

to draw. These books helped us learn the writing process. First, we were asked to write about whatever topic was assigned. At the time I didn't know it, but our teachers were trying to familiarize us with the different genres of writing. One year we were assigned fiction, another year we had to do an A-Z book, and in fifth grade we were told to reflect on each grade at Lynwood Elementary School. This is an example of how our writing allowed us to be creative and have freedom. Every child's book was completely original and there was no specific way that our story had to be written. I was able to be creative when thinking of a cute and catchy title. Each year I created a little story that was completely unique.

The first time our teacher taught us about rough drafts, I thought she said we needed to turn in a "rough giraffe". I quickly learned that it was not as exciting as it sounded, and I had to turn in my first copy of my book to be proof read and corrected. After that was done, we were allowed to transfer our writing into our books. I had a paper that helped me to write in straight lines, which was probably the hardest part of the whole assignment as a first grader. After we had our story written in the book, it was time for the fun part. The illustrations were almost every child's favorite part of the book, and they defiantly were my favorite part. Next came the about the author page. I included my latest school picture and wrote a paragraph about myself. It usually went something like this, Casey Gelderman lives in Farmingville, New York with her mom, dad, brother Kyle and sister Lindsey. She is in (whatever grade) at Lynwood Elementary School. In her spare time Casey likes to play soccer, and she is a Girl Scout. The only thing that would change year to year was my grade level, and I usually added more and more out of school activities. In hindsight, I enjoyed all of these steps to creating my book because I was creating my own stories that were just like the books I enjoyed reading.

At the end of the writing process, the students were rewarded for all of the work we had put into our books. Whoever had the best book got their book displayed in a showcase for the whole school to see as they walked into the building. We also had author illustrator day when all the parents were invited to the school to view all the students' finished books. I got to celebrate my writing by sharing with all the parents that came to see our books. This whole process made me really interested and excited about writing. I was proud of every book that I created because I was able to show my personality and creativity in my books. Writing these stories is what I was good at, and writing the books in elementary school started my interest in writing. I got to celebrate my writing by sharing with all the parents that came to see our books.

I was in seventh grade, Mrs. Schibani's class, when I first heard the word memoir. We had just gotten back from our winter break, and I immediately thought of the perfect story to write about when our teacher was explaining the assignment. I was so excited to write my first "memoir". This was definitely one of the first writing pieces I was assigned that I had gotten excited about since writing the books in elementary school. On Christmas Eve that year, I fell ice-skating, and needed to get stitches on my chin. In addition to that, on the way to the hospital, my mom and I got in a car accident. I wrote in detail about the events that happened that day, and it forced me to articulate the lesson that I learned from that experience. I ended the essay with, "Was the glass half empty, or half full?". My mom and I were fortunate enough to get to go home healthy that Christmas Eve. I realized some people are not as fortunate. This particular essay was selected by my middle school teachers to be entered for a writing contest. That year, I learned the revising and editing step of the writing process. I had to make my paper perfect if I wanted to win the contest. Sadly, I did not end up winning the contest, but it did a lot for my confidence as writer.

As a senior in high school, I was able to explore different genres of writing in my English class. My teacher introduced us to genres such as screenplay, different types of poems, social commentary, memoir, parody, monologue, research paper, and many more. I learned about all of these genres however, I found myself drawn to memoir writing. Once again I wrote about the same story that I wrote about in seventh grade, but I was able to go into more detail. The interesting part about this piece was I hadn't looked at this in five years, yet I was able to create the story again. I can only live an experience once, but I can write about it many times, and I enjoy capturing the moment in my writing. I found the essay I wrote in seventh grade and it was funny to compare my seventh grade writing to my current writing. I think exploring all the different genres was necessary and important to my development as a writer. It was important because I needed to learn all of those genres to expand my knowledge, but it also reassured me that I was best at writing memoirs and stories. I was taught at a young age to write stories and be creative, so it is clear why I favored memoirs.

I am grateful that I had the opportunities and freedom that I had when I was younger to be able to find my interests and be creative with my writing. Now, elementary school kids do not have the same opportunities that I had. Unfortunately, these kids have no choice except to follow the common core. It is unfortunate that kids do not have the chance to explore and grow like I did when I was their age. Lynwood Elementary School probably does not write books every year due to recent budget problems and the increasing demand of common core. I can assume that I would be a very different writer had I not had six years of participating in the mandatory author illustrator week to spark my interest in story writing. Another thing I am most grateful for is being lucky enough to have my parents available to read to me every night starting at such a young age and continuing throughout my childhood. With advancing

technology, it is becoming more and more common for kids to play on an iPad rather than pick up a hard copy of a book. I appreciate the childhood I had and the education I received because it allowed me the freedom to develop and grow as a reader and writer, and it gave me the confidence to explore the complex art of writing.