

Walsh Reader Autobiography

Tracing my own process of becoming a reader has given me a lot of insight into the reader I am today. As we have learned, reading is a process. After creating my own reader timeline, I noticed that it is an ever changing process as well. Many of us mentioned that our love of reading did not occur in school. It was interesting to see how I was one of the only ones who was influenced to read from my 7th grade class. Before middle school though, I had no interest in reading. I remember having to read for set amounts of time as a kid where my mom would set the timer and one that *beep beep beep* went off it meant freedom.

As an adult, I wish I could share the same love for Judy Blume books, Harry Potter, or Nancy Drew. These book series were not something that was valued or encouraged in my house. Having to read historical fiction novels about Plymouth Rock did not encourage my joy of reading at all. I do remember reading Shel Silverstein poetry as a kid and enjoyed that a lot. In 5th grade I checked out only one book from my school library but checked it out at least 5 times that year. This book was also primarily poetry called *Out of the Dust*. It wasn't until doing this timeline of myself as a reader that I noticed the pattern that the texts I loved were poetry texts.

I have always loved the sound of words. My grandfather would tell me stories before going to bed as a little kid. These stories were primarily from his series of "bad boy stories" as he would call them, about growing up in Charlestown in Boston. Sometimes he would tell me the story of Les Miserable, now my favorite story of all time. Loving poetry as a child doesn't surprise me much because of how it must have soothed me, just as my Papa's stories soothed me.

It wasn't until my 7th grade history class that I fell in love with literature. My teacher had us read Elie Wiesel's *Night* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* which were so interesting to me. I also believe, especially now after this course, that I liked that he had us read a challenging text. I wasn't the best student in middle school. I always scored low on my Iowa tests or any other standardized test we had to take. I did alright in reading, definitely better than math, but I was not a high scorer at all. My best friend growing up was a great student and a great reader. My teacher gave her *The Grapes of Wrath* to read in 7th grade as an extra reading assignment. I was jealous because this made me feel like I wasn't smart enough to get a "hard text" too. I was not internally motivated to become a good reader, just like my friend.

From 8th grade to senior year of high school, I read many fiction novels starting with *The Secret Life of Bees* which was the first novel to really feel the pleasure a story can give. This sparked my interest in reading for fun outside of school. In high school, I always had a novel with me to read in that extra 5 minutes of class we had at the end and would sometimes read even during instruction, oops! I mentioned previously that my test scores have always been very low. I had to take an entrance exam to get into my high school and those scores placed us in either remedial, regular or honors classes. I was placed in all regular but was given the option to take Latin which would have given me an honors credit. My family at first discouraged me from taking Latin because it would be too hard for me. I never felt that my family saw me as a smart kid growing up, and this didn't help. I insisted that I could do it. On top of that, I would get all As in my regular classes so I could move up to honors for my sophomore year. I not only got an A in Latin that year but I also was able to move up to honors in all classes, except math, which

has never been my thing. Sophomore year I was surrounded by students who were at a higher level, which also challenged me to push myself. I have always surrounded myself with people who inspire me and can teach me something. I know that if I did not choose to push myself into honors, I would have been held back.

My English teacher my sophomore year gave me so much positive reinforcement when I participated in class that I felt that I really “got” this literature thing. I felt the fire in me in English class that I didn’t feel anywhere else and knew that I wanted to be an English major in college. I continued reading my fiction novels for fun but now had an interest in classics and the text we reading class. One let down was reading *Moby Dick*. We read at home and in class and took reading quizzes that I never could pass. I felt a bit defeated with this whale of a text. No joy happened with *Moby Dick*. I wouldn’t be opposed to trying it again now that I am a stronger reader and a teacher. I got into E.E. Cummings and Emily Dickinson and spent many afternoons at Barnes and Noble looking to find a new poetry book. Junior year of high school I read *Frankenstein* and British poetry as well as *Hamlet* and *King Lear* and that was it. I had to be an English teacher. I knew this internally but didn’t tell anyone yet. I have no teachers in my family and I knew my family wanted me to go into business. I had always known that wasn’t going to happen.

One thing that has always been a challenge for me has been reading for joy while in college or working. For the past 5 years, I have only been able to really read for fun in the summer months or over holiday vacations. I will buy or be given books and then I try to read them but something comes up or a lesson plan as to be written or I need to reread that act of *Hamlet* once again. I want to set a goal for myself and make reading for fun a priority. I need it for my sanity and to remember why I made this my profession. If I no longer take the time to enjoy reading, how will my students learn to enjoy it as well.