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Literature Autobiography

As a young child, reading was always a part of my daily routine. My mother was a giant believer in instilling and keeping a schedule for both myself and my younger brother. Following dinner, we would take our baths, put on our pajamas and get into bed by 7:15. That would allow us enough time to read one of our favorite stories. This was a daily occurrence growing up; a custom that was rarely missed. I think about myself wearing my flannel nightgown, snuggled up in my bed, laying my head against my mother's shoulder. This is how I unconsciously learned the importance of literature and reading.

Reading is something that my parents, teachers and grandparents discussed with me consistently. These key individuals in my life told me that reading would always take me places, and the more I read, the smarter I would become; a notion I did not necessarily take in until I considered it for this assignment. I've found that these conversations are ones that I have with my young first graders as well. As an elementary school student, I enrolled in every reading challenge that was offered, including the memorable Pizza Hut "Book It" program. These types of programs undeniably motivated me to read as much as I could. The more I read, the more I liked to read.

Like so many things in life, reading takes motivation. Motivation to dive into a captivating story, motivation to escape with the characters, motivation to win a prize, etc. One critical pattern I

discovered was this view of motivation. I have always been a very competitive person in every arena of my childhood and adulthood. Once I begin a book or project, I am very driven to finish it. I think this is why I read so many books as a child; once I started I could not stop. One example of this would be annual family vacations to Martha's Vineyard. We traveled with another family which included my good friend, Mallory. She too loved reading and we would have mini competitions to see who could read more. I think about being eleven and lying on the beach reading our favorite R.L. Stein's series, Goosebumps. As I think about it today, I hear the waves crashing, feel the sun beating down, and visualize the two of us speeding through at least two novels a day.

As I have learned as an educator, extrinsic motivators can eventually morph into intrinsic motivation. I believe this is precisely what happened in my case. The competition and prizes contributed to my love for reading as a child and now as an adult. I wonder now if those competitions were not a part of my childhood, would I have fell in love with reading in a different way? Would it have taken me longer? I am confident reading would always have been a significant piece of my life, but it's compelling to consider how it may have been altered.

In addition to reading often, I also read very fast. I could read a page just about faster than anybody, but once I became a teacher of reading I realized I did not comprehend everything that I read. This was a fairly shocking discovery that I made not too many years ago. I would realize that I missed important parts of stories because I had simply skimmed over them instead of investing myself by reading slowly and carefully. One of my goals in recent years has been to slow down and enjoy the actual process of reading more. Instead of saying, "I have to finish this

book so I can move on to the next one on my list!" I want to continue to work on relaxing and being devoted to the current book I'm reading.

Creating a literature biography certainly helped me understand more about myself as a reader. Just like my mother started years ago, I have shaped a reading schedule for myself in my adult life. I prefer to read personal books during the summer and on vacations, just like I loved doing as a young girl. One surprising fact I discovered was I can be very stubborn when choosing books to read; I will not be as interested unless I am reading it on my own terms. One instance of this was within the last month. I was asked to help with my school's reading bowl by reading a book and writing questions about it for students to study for their competition. The book was one I own and wanted to read for years, *Seekers* by Erin Hunter. Although I had been excited to read it, I found myself struggling to pick it up. Because I didn't pick the time to read it, I was not compelled to read it. I can connect this trait to my overall personality; if no one tells me to do it, I will, happily. If someone instructs me to, I won't nearly be as eager.

My love for reading has unarguably transcended into my life as a teacher. What I love most about reading are the connections I can make to my own life or experiences. I find I love sharing books with my students and I share those connections with them. Responding to literature can be powerful, and I want my students to have a piece of that too. I do this by "thinking out loud" for students or by explaining why I liked a particular character or storyline. When it is time to teach reading, I find myself getting excited and more animated in my teaching. I try to hook my students in any way I can into my reading lessons. I aim to get my readers to answer the tough questions about books, rather than low level questions that require one word answers. I

consciously ask students to make connections to their own lives, share their feelings, ask questions. I feel that students rise to their teacher's expectations, so by expecting them to think more deeply about their text, they will.

When researching and thinking about writing a literature biography, I found some complexities about my reading life that I had not considered, or even thought about, before. I realized I read for many reasons. I read for pleasure, to escape into someone else's story. Just like years ago, reading thrilling and suspenseful books like R.L Stein is something I enjoy. These days Jodi Pocult and Anita Shreve mysteries enchant me completely. I love trying to figure out what is going to happen next, but also the joy of knowing there will only be more twists and turns along the way.

I also read for information and to learn. I think about *The First Days of School* by Harry Wong, a text that I read every summer before school starts. I find excellent teaching tips and management ideas that I can use. This book also gets me back into the teaching mode, after my relaxing and fun-filled summer. It refocuses me and puts me back into the correct mindset. I also like reading books like Debbie Miller's *Reading with Meaning*. Again, I find useful and relevant techniques that can enrich my classroom and my thinking as a teacher. If a colleague rants about a great teaching book, I will be the first to pick it up.

In addition to reading for learning through classroom books, I also read to learn in my graduate classes. I enrolled in this course because I wanted to learn more about reaching students diversely with literature. The booklist was particularly compelling because it focuses primarily on picture books. I have a deep adoration for picture books because I believe thinking about

their messages can be incredibly meaningful for both young and older students. There are countless ways to connect with a book and each person does so in a different way. Sharing these ideas can help open students' eyes to new ideas and perspectives about our world. I bring these thoughts with me as I teach reading to my first graders. Although I do not think about it all day or all the time, these reading ideals are instilled in me as a person and as an educator.

I realize if I did not take reading seriously and ask the tough questions myself, I would not be geared to do that in my classroom. Perhaps literature takes on a different significance in my room than it might in another, simply because of my own personal attitudes about it. If I had not grown up in a supportive environment that fostered a love for learning and reading, I may not be the teacher I am today. I feel that the possibilities with reading are endless. Different people, and students, can take a piece of literature to new directions and heights. That is what I love most about reading; not knowing where it will take me next.

Time Frame	What I Was Reading
0-3	Nursery rhymes, baby books, pop-up books, with Momo and Papa, mom and dad, only grandchild-lots of attention, reading in nightgown in bed, snuggled up
3-6	Bearstien Bear books, Disney books, with Ian, at school, with mom and dad, Mickey teaching books
6-9	Dr. Seuss, American Girl novels with dolls, German Dictionary with dad, Madeleine books with Momo, Amelia Bedelia books
9-12	R.L. Stein Goosebumps books, Nancy Drew, Boxcar Children, Judy Blume
12-15	Seventeen magazine
15-18	Mysteries, crime (who done it) novels, books for AP English and other school books
18-21	College books & readings, in dorm room, loud music, friends and roommates, Nicholas Sparks novels, in the summer
21-24	Classroom books, <i>The First Days of School</i> by Wong, <i>Reading with Meaning</i> by Debbie Miller, home with parents during internship, first job, Jodi Pocult, reading for fun in summer, Reading picture books to my students, Twilight
24-27	"Fun" books like Shopaholic series, in summer, grad school readings & books, reading Dr. Seuss to my students and Amelia Bedelia, telling students "reading is thinking"