

December 5, 2005, was the first time I sat in an American classroom. Sitting at a desk surrounded by people I did not know, accents I did not recognize, and unexpected challenges I did not foresee, I was completely and utterly alone. Overwhelmed with feelings of apprehension, frustration, and loneliness, and unaware if these sentiments would ever subside, I isolated myself from mostly everyone in my life. I did not talk unless spoken to, did not answer questions unless called on, and did not make any attempt to make friends, even if they tried making a friend of me. Although it was my choice to act in such a way, I was living a life in a deafening silence.

Just a short month prior to this moment, I was stripped from the only land I ever knew, leaving my grandparents and friends behind, and flew on my first airplane, a 9-hour flight from London, where I had spent the previous five and a half years of my existence. Coming to the United States presented a plethora of inevitable adjustments, but the most difficult were those of the unexpected. I had recently mastered the English course that I was taking back home in Leicester, and actually enjoyed it the most out of the classes that I was taking, but that outlook metamorphosed when I first discovered that American English had meager, but completely disheartening alterations from the English that I had just developed an appreciation for. Words such as “favourite,” “colour,” and “tyre” changed in miniscule ways, but posed more frustration to a five-year-old than I could ever explain. I got deducted points on countless assignments and spelling tests, and began to think that I was never going to succeed in this seemingly new language that I had to gain an entire new understanding of.

Not only did the physical orthography of the language provide complications in my early childhood education, writing became an adversarial activity that only inspired

grievances. I was unmotivated and uninspired by anything that my teachers prompted me to write, and became lethargic in my other studies as well. All of this eventually led the principal to make the executive decision of holding me back a grade, in the effort to ensure that I accurately learn the content of that year. This was devastating news to me, because it only deepened my feelings of inadequacy and incapability. Eventually I came to the realization that in order to improve my dexterity, I would need to make a conscious effort to utilize the knowledge that I was taught in the classroom, and commit it to memory. In these endeavors of a newly found drive and ambition to succeed, I established a valuable work ethic, essential study habits, and satisfying sense of independence that has lasted me throughout my days.

In the years following my initial adversity that accompanied my migration to this country, I became a dedicated and responsible student in all of my subjects and extracurriculars, however, I still did not hold English in the highest esteem. I never developed an excitement for writing, because the writing topics were always set and structured, with little opportunity available to discover my personal writing style through simply putting my own words on a page. One instance that altered this course of displeasure in my writing career was in my freshman year of high school, when I was actually given the freedom to write about a topic of my choice, with little interference of a meticulous framework and organization style. This sparked a minor, but definitive change in my attitude towards literacy, and what power it holds. The teacher who assigned this essay became an extraordinarily influential person in my writing, and helped shape who I am as a writer today by providing an opportunity to use my words in discussion of something that was important to me and that I wanted to be heard, as

opposed to robotically composing analytical essays about another person's writing. In this case that topic was the value of integrity, and what it looks like to have that increasingly rare quality in today's society. Mr. Spencer became a constant literacy sponsor in my first year of high school, and would continue to guide me through graduation as someone that I could always turn to in times of need, whether it be proofreading a research paper, or writing a letter of recommendation, he gave me the confidence I needed to reach my full potential as a writer, and inspired me to continue to challenge myself in all aspects of learning. As Deborah Brandt explained in her research article, *Sponsors of Literacy*, "Encounters with literacy sponsors...can be sites for the innovative rerouting of resources into projects of self-development and social change" (76), and that is exactly what I saw happen to me in my encounter of my first literacy sponsor. I began to further devote myself in the development of my writing, putting in the utmost effort into each assignment given, and frequently asking questions about different ways to improve my writing, the fruits of my labor were clearly demonstrated in my exponentially increasing grade in English. My mindset on English had reverted to a previously known one of excitement and curiosity; my family began to notice a change as well, one family member in particular, was my grandfather.

I grew up with the unconscious knowledge that, no matter what the occasion, my grandfather could always be found with a book in his hand. I did not take notice to it until after I overcame my intense aversion to literacy, and developed more of an interest in it. When I was traveling with him one summer day, I asked, "What's that book you're reading?" and he looked at me with his familiar, warm smile and explained: "It's a novel set in the western times, cowboys running the plains, chasing after adventure at every

turn, right now the main character is tied up in a cellar, awaiting his capturers return.”

He continued on with the summation of the story for the next twenty minutes or so, and I was unable to restrain myself from wanting to know more about Festus and his never-ending battle between justice and morality. From then on, I would always ask what book Papa was reading, and what trouble the cowboys had gotten themselves into. I was always close with my grandpa, but this sharing of stories became a tradition of ours that we both treasure to date. As Malcolm X described in his autobiography, “Anyone who has read a great deal can imagine the new world that opened” (108). Through our conversation, my eyes were opened to this new world. A world of imagination, adventure, endless possibilities, and serendipities yet to be made.

Each of these experiences, in one way or another, have shaped me into the writer that I am today. I have discovered that I enjoy novels that have more mystery and adventure in the plots, and that I am more suited for experimental writing rather than structured essays, however, I am learning to accept the structure and organization, and in doing so, have opened my mind to the possibilities that may spur in pursuit of it. I am continuing to develop my literacy ingenuity by actively working to further my abilities in forming coherent, impactful pieces that are efficient and inspiring in one way or another. My current attitude about writing is that, although it is still somewhat of a daunting task to me, I look forward to improving my literacy prowess into something that I can take complete pride and gratification in.

Works Cited Page

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