

## **“Growing Up With Writing”**

It’s difficult to open yourself up when the subject is you. For starters, you have to take your memories at face value because questioning them only makes the past fuzzier than it already is. Questioning if something was true or false (or slightly exaggerated) tends to get in the way of the actual memory, making the past almost a work of fiction. Then you have to decide what even got you to this point in the first place. There’s a reason I am who I am today that goes beyond the realm of here and now. And then, once you’ve made a solid conclusion about you as a person, it comes time to think about the future. Do you think you’ll still understand yourself as you do right now (after doing some serious self-research) when you’ve had 20 more years of experience with the world?

Throughout my time here I’ve tried to articulate the parts of my life and how they’ve affected me. It’s not something I suggest doing, but it leads to a lot of answers. Answers that sometimes have other questions. I know for a fact that I’m a better writer than I was yesterday and 8 years ago, but why am I a better writer? What kept me from being the writer I am right now? There may be more than one answer, but for now I’m going to give one in the form of a thread of memories. Significant parts of my life that I believe have given me the experience I needed to become the writer I am today.

It’s still difficult to remember if I wrote my essay about Lewis and Clark’s expedition in 5th grade or 6th grade (I forgot the teacher who assigned it). And unfortunately, the more I try to remember the hazier it becomes, so I’m not even going to attempt to be numerically accurate anymore, it was the Christmas season and I still didn’t really care about writing. I consider winter in Florida to be a bit of a miracle. When the season comes around, going outside becomes

a recreational event in itself. I remember the first day the cold front came in the year I wrote this paper. I walked outside to put in some mail before my grandma woke up to drive me to school. Being the energetic approximately-10-year-old that I was (maybe 11?), I rarely ever paid attention to the news or weather, so here I was in an undershirt and underwear going out into 40 degree weather. Needless to say that I was incredibly inspired to go back inside. That day I was given the very special assignment that would change my views on writing forever. Everyone in the class moaned as we were assigned a two-page research project about the expedition Lewis and Clark took. What made it special, and what made us moan, was that it had to be written in the perspective of one of the travelers who went with them on their journey. I decided it would be funny to do the report from the perspective of their dog, Seaman. I laughed all the way to the library where I came to the chocking realization that not a lot of historians really considered dogs to play a huge role in American history. Being the ambiguous age I was, I rationalized that if there was no information on Seaman, then there was no report to be had. I asked my teacher kindly if she would let me change who I wrote the perspective from (all my teachers in elementary school and 6th grade were women). Seeing this as an opportunity to turn me into an experiment, she said no and told me to write the essay the best I could. So I told myself that was it, there was nothing else to do. I couldn't get the research I needed and I could change my subject matter, so where could I go. It was getting close to Christmas Break, the time where hot cocoa comes in large quantities and all anyone can ever think about is what television specials they're going to watch for 24 hours. The last thing I had on my mind was getting around this problem, but it had to be addressed soon otherwise my academic career, and most likely my life, would cease to exist. Finally, with the due date staring at me in the face and my mom making hot cocoa in my peripheral vision, I decided I needed to write something. Listen, I play a

lot of video games. If I was to take some time out of the day to do the math, I would probably have to write an essay about how video games kept me from fulfilling my lifelong dream of owning Disney World (the sad part is this might not even be a joke). I've had experience solving puzzles, and this situation was no different. I sat there wrapped up in my blanket, determined to write something cohesive for some sort of grade.

That's when it all hit me. I could make an argument that this was the first time I did any real critical thinking. In reality it definitely wasn't, but it was the first time in my life I felt that I did something I thought was intuitive. "If this is from Seaman's perspective, why do I need to know about Seaman? He's a dog. I just need to write about Lewis and Clark's expedition and how it affects Seaman as a dog." I had no idea that by choosing to write from Seaman's perspective, I had created the best constraint ever. It allowed me to creatively address the research I had obtained about Lewis and Clark's journey while adding new information into the mix. Of course, being the first essay that I actually tried to add new information, the new information addresses things such as "What did Seaman think about traveling?" and "What do dogs do when they face troubles on a journey of that caliber?" It's nothing mind-blowing, but it's special to me because of what it did. I started to realize what writing could do. Writing not only answered certain questions, but also asked new ones. Writing doesn't have to be this set in stone, grocery list of a medium. I can talk.

It started to go downhill after that though. Once all the hot cocoa was gone and it came time to back to school, I was greeted with the worst thing a private school student with a strict mother could ever imagine: a C. I still remember my face getting as red as a lobster when I saw it. It was actually kind of nice considering how cold it was outside, but that didn't really help the situation much. It wasn't really the fact that my mom was probably going to kill me that made

me sad, it was the fact that I thought I wrote this paper well. The grammar was fine, I thought it was interesting, and it followed the assignment guidelines. Did I not talk about the actual exploration well enough? Was the premise just too silly for my teacher to take seriously? I started to question my revelation, and from then on I was average.

From that year until 11th grade I became acquainted with all the rules. 5 paragraphs only, paragraphs should be this many sentences, thesis statements must have 3 ideas presented in them, and essays must have at least 3 sources cited in them. I think the best way for me to summarize my writing from 7th grade to the end of 11th grade is as follows:

“One time I read a book. It was a lot different from the movie because this reviewer said so. (Source of review) The book talks about idea 1, idea 2, and idea 3. Let me talk about these ideas in further detail and quote where they came from occasionally.”

If I said that there was anything more to them I would probably be lying. I’m sure somewhere in that mess of time that I had a good idea here and there, but I was always too scared to go outside of what was asked of me in fear of my grade. Ideas can take you anywhere, but good grades get you into college. Because of this mindset, my love for writing died out as quickly as it came, and for a decent chunk of my life, I would view writing as simply a chore that had no more influence on my life as mowing the lawn did.

It wasn’t until I started to write for scholarships (the money that would get me into aforementioned college) that things got exciting. I remember one scholarship essay specifically where I talked about how the arts influenced my life. The prompt for the essay was simply take a

moment in time where art changed the way I viewed things. I wanted to be unique this time around mainly because I knew a lot of people would apply for this scholarship, but also because I wasn't in school right then and there, so grades weren't a factor. I started to write about the first time I cooked eggs. It was when I went to my first Civil War reenactment and I had to live just as they did (this also meant cooking for myself). To sum up a 4 page paper, the fact that I cooked the eggs myself made them taste better than any other eggs I had before in my life. I came to the conclusion that making your own art makes it that much more special, and if I never made those eggs, I would've never realized that. It got me to start writing personally, and it was fantastic. It was the first time in a while I was free to write when and how I wanted to because essays for scholarships didn't have strict deadlines and wanted essays that felt out of the norm. If I was to ever make writing a professional endeavor, I would want it to be that way all the time. It stayed a well-hidden secret, these scholarship essays. The writing I did in school was still stiff and uninteresting, but at least now I had a way to express myself (and make money).

The biggest change came this year, however. Well, maybe not change, but confirmation. See, I always thought my first year of college would simply be reconciliation. I would walk in, tell the teacher my sins, the teacher would tell me to do x amount of prayers, I'd go and do them, and that was it. I realize now that isn't the case. Sometimes teachers care, and sometimes they like to give closure to doubts you've had since you were 10. I was told that it was okay to write the way I do when I'm not being graded. That with a little practice I could turn my voice, this thing that I thought may have been a flaw in my writing for all these years, into scholarly inquiry that others could come to respect. I wrote my first essay in the class, sitting on the laptop as I am now. I had done the research, now all I had to do was turn on the jazz music and put my heart and soul into what I wanted to say about the discoveries I made for my assignment. It didn't

matter how personal I got or how many idea I expressed. As long as I elaborated on everything I was golden. I could essentially say anything I wanted and it would be seen as work. I compared graphic design to a banana, it was fun. And it made me fall in love with writing the same way I did when I was writing about a dog's opinion on New Land exploration and when I wrote about artful eggs. And I think that's all I ever really wanted, confirmation. I just wanted to know if it was okay to write the way I did in the real world, or at least for school anyway. Knowing that professionals write using the same techniques I having the same problems with writing that I do and that what I'm doing is essentially right is something of a treasure, and I seriously mean that.

I like to think that I worked hard to get to where I am as a writer today. Even though I'm still a teenager, I feel confident enough in saying that I've put a lot of work into writing at a semi-mature level. Writing is tough, and that's all there is to it. The only reason writing feels easy sometimes is because we've practiced certain ideas enough times that it just comes out naturally. Writing is a fantastic medium because improving your writing can come in any shape or form. And for me, improving my writing came from this melodrama I had with my love for writing. Was it right or wrong? Was it worth the time? It was undoubtedly worth every second. Knowing the lows and highs of writing has given me a new appreciation for it, and knowing that it's okay to write the way I do gives me confidence in the future. I think, now that I know sharing my thoughts is something smart people do, I can start to really explore the world for what it really is, and express the way I feel about something in a way where someone else ready might get something out of it. All I ever hope is that I can leave a mark on someone, make a difference for somebody that will make their day a little better or make them think just a little more than they already do. I hope that, with this new-found confidence in my voice, I can do that in my writing.