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## The Fight for the Outdoors

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## The Fight for the Outdoors

### Writing Process

After being given the assignment of a literacy narrative, our class read multiple different examples to see how they were constructed. One thing that stuck out to me, and that our professor really honed in on, was the extensive use of detail to create good imagery. After forcing as much detail as possible into my first draft, I was then able to clean it up by simply removing words and phrases that made some segments of the story much too wordy.

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ENG100

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Meredith Doench

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### The Fight for the Outdoors\*

My anxious, brown eyes flashed back and forth from the clock to my mom. She shook her head, and without words I snatched the paper from her hands and marched back into my chamber, also known as my dad's office. The sun pierced through the windows, glistening off the computer screen and glass covering of my dad's desk. My attention span was that of a squirrel, as I constantly switched focus from the paper to the beautiful sight out the window. The repeated pounding of the ball was torturous, but even worse was the yelling and laughter of my friends. "Why is the neighborhood basketball court on my driveway?" I asked myself in frustration. Determined, I took a seat, clasped my hands over both of my ears, and studied the paper as quickly as possible. Confidently, I trotted back into the kitchen, picked up the pencil, and prepared for my mom to quiz me one final time. As she read through my answers, I retied my sky blue Nikes to ensure full ankle support.

"Wrong! How? Can't we do this later?" I exclaimed as my mom sentenced me back to my dad's office.

"I before E except after C or when sounding like A as in neighbor or weigh" she said, and I slammed the door.

After repeating this phrase over and over again in my head, something clicked. This time she smiled, nodding her head up and down as she scanned through my responses. I could not help but think that she was some sort of otherworldly prophet. I gave her a huge hug and eagerly

ran away so that I could finally play basketball on my severely slanted driveway. The next day I got twenty out of twenty words correct on my spelling test.

This was a typical Thursday afternoon for my mother and me. Spelling tests were on Fridays, and she knew that, in order to prepare me best, her biggest bargaining chip was my passion for the outdoors. The weather or time of year was always a nonfactor, as my friends and I would dabble in anything from street hockey to snow football. Frankly, all that mattered was that we were outside and with each other. If we could just get to that point, then even the dumbest of ideas could lead to the best day of our young lives. So competitive and zealous were our endeavors, the day often ended in fighting and argument, as we each stubbornly retreated homeward. However, the following day after school we would all ring each other's doorbells and inevitably be back out there smiling and laughing yet again. Playing outside with my friends was seemingly what I lived for growing up, and my mom knew that even better than I. Remarkably, she was able to make learning and schoolwork a key. However, this was no ordinary key. It was one that held the potential to open an alternate universe, a universe containing everything that I lived for. After being held prisoner for hours on end, the last thing I wanted to do each day was go home and continue my schoolwork. Finding any sort of desire to learn to read and write was always a struggle for me growing up, but with time and creativity my mom was able to mastermind a process that combined both the outdoors and schoolwork into one passion.

The second grade curriculum was not one of too much complexity. Mrs. Taylor's twenty-word spelling tests were easy once I got accustomed to my aforementioned routine. Also, the words were not very challenging considering we were still in the process of learning to handwrite the alphabet. After getting used to it, and receiving perfect scores on all of the tests, staying inside for a while after school on Thursdays was no big deal. However, I was in for quite

the rude awakening when I entered Mrs. Steck's third grade class. Expected now to know both print and cursive, our learning goals became more heavily focused on spelling and reading. Mrs. Steck gave me a new sense of the word *homework*. Spelling tests were now conducted on both Tuesdays and Thursdays, intertwined with lengthy reading assignments due on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. This amplified workload forced me to stay inside for an extensive period of time every day. Accustomed to just staying in on Thursdays, I found myself with absolutely no motivation to do my work. Making matters worse, the neighborhood bus stop was at the end of my driveway. Every day, my friends would leap off of the bus and drop their backpacks against my basketball hoop. Meanwhile, my disheartened soul would venture up the driveway towards hell.

Upon my arrival at home each day, I would open the door to be welcomed with a divine-like scent of what most kids would have called an after school snack. However, this was no ordinary after school snack. In fact, it was no snack at all. It was a full-fledged meal that "could feed an army" my mother would say. I was a growing boy, a hungry boy, and oftentimes a guinea pig to test what my mom was preparing for that night's dinner. This fourth meal of mine was really something special. Day after day, I plunged myself into that same red chair at the head of the table and engulfed my mom's god-worthy cuisine like a vacuum. Nine years of age at the time, there was essentially only one part of this after school feeding that I truly longed for. *Dessert*. Although all of my mom's food was good, her true calling in life, or at least what a nine-year-old sugar hungry savage perceived it to be, was baking. As I reached the end of the garage each day, I did not open a door. I opened Pandora's box, and what awaited me in the kitchen could be a milkshake, a cake, cupcakes, cinnamon rolls, cookies, or a plethora of other surprises. Regardless, it was always something special. My tastes buds of course were not

permitted to savor these unhealthy treats until my primary meal consisting of various fruits and vegetables was consumed. Nevertheless, every day before I began the treacherous task of unloading my backpack and doing homework, I thankfully had the detox of my mother's after school snacks.

I can still vividly recall the day that stole my childhood innocence. It was sunny; not a cloud in the sky. I needed a haircut badly but managed to coerce my mom during breakfast to wait just one more day. It was Wednesday, the one day of the week that none of my neighborhood friends had conflicting baseball practices. We had recently become infatuated with this mind-blowing phenomenon called "ultimate frisbee." We planned to play until sundown; that is, of course, once the kid at 1439 Larsen Lane finished his homework. Mindful of this, I hopped off the bus and came in through the door like a wrecking ball. I opened my throat wide and scarfed down my meal faster than I ever had before. Balancing on the edge of my seat, I leaned forward and stretched my little arm towards the double-chocolate brownies in the middle of the kitchen counter. To my dismay, my mother ever-so-gently ceased my arm, nonchalantly stating that I must complete my homework first, as if this were the everyday routine. I was outraged. I was appalled. Most of all, I was sad. A sugar rush was required to have any chance of completing my homework, or so I thought.

My mom was smart, really smart. In retrospect, I can now see that I had grown so accustomed to the routine of finishing my homework before I could go out and play, that I developed into this miniature conman who manipulated the system. It was simple really; finish my homework as fast as I possibly could, show my mom, and then before she had the chance to proofread it, vanish into the glorious outdoors. As I continued to do this, my academic performance progressively stooped, not to a terribly low level, but I was no longer consistently

receiving those perfect scores on my spelling tests. By simply moving the dessert portion of my snack to after my schoolwork, my mom now possessed the opportunity to analyze my work while I ate. The conman gene must run in the family, because my window to disappear and be free had now dissipated. Did I realize that at the time? No. I was a nine-year-old boy fantasizing about my wedding day with those mouth-watering, double-chocolate brownies. As I ate, my mom would teach and I would listen. Most importantly, I would learn.

Had my mom worked, had my mom not cared, had my mom not been there every day after school, would I still be able to read and write today? Yes, of course, but not nearly to the same extent. Without my mom's learning methodology, I would never have been able to reach the level of academic success and literacy which I currently possess. I was very fortunate to grow up in a society where literacy was commonplace and would have been achieved regardless. I was even more blessed, however, to have a mom that cared enough to intertwine her goal of enhancing my literacy with all of my passions and cravings. By transforming my favorite parts of the day into incentives, learning to read and write not only became worthwhile, but it became easy and fun.

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