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A Literary Journey Back in Time

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A Literary Journey Back in Time

Writing Process

Before I began writing, I reflected on the effect literature has had on my life. I brainstormed different experiences in which I found literature to be very influential. I talked with various people including my parents and past teachers to ensure the accuracy of the various childhood stories I decided to write about. When it came time to put the final draft together, I focused on my various experiences with literature and the grand effect it has had on my life. I also incorporated why I value being a literate person today as a university student.

***Editor's note:** For this paper, the author received the journal's award for Best Literacy Narrative (\$100 prize).*

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A Literary Journey Back in Time

Hannah K. Heil

Finally, the mail had arrived. I was elated to see a letter from Julia Alvarez in the stack. I had been anxiously awaiting a response. I chose to write Alvarez, the author of many young adult books, about her childhood as a Puerto Rican in the United States. I had poured my heart and soul into the letter that I had written her, emphasizing how much her books had touched me. After reading her response, there was no doubt Alvarez understood that. The next day in class I eagerly handed my letter to my teacher. Mrs. McCarron was an upbeat and laid-back middle-aged seventh grade English teacher from Boston. She had a Boston accent that sometimes slipped out when she said words like “scissors.” After reading my letter, Mrs. McCarron beamed. “Hannah, this is wonderful!” she exclaimed. “The best we’ve ever had!” I could barely contain the joy I felt. Mrs. McCarron was genuinely impressed with my work, and her approval made me feel as if I had won a gold star. In the letter I received, Alvarez told me how much *my* letter inspired *her*. “Wait, what?” Yes. Then to have my English teacher be just as impressed by my work, I was not sure if my passion and love for literature could be more amplified than it was right then.

Just as words fill pages, words have filled my life. From the time I was too young to read or write myself, I loved letters, words, and stories. I would open books and make up the words that filled the page. I would fill journals with scribbles when I didn’t know how to form sentences myself. As I grew older and became literate, I developed a sincere love for reading and books. My days were spent reading, and my nights consisted of ice cream and my mom reading to me. I was taught to cherish books and the words they held. Thus, my early days of literature, such as in seventh grade, were only the beginning. Reflecting on memories of my youth, including the incredible experience of receiving a personal letter from a published author, I am aware of literature’s impact on my

life. It is only because of these past experiences that I can say I value literature, words, and stories as fervently as I do now.

Seventh grade was not the beginning of my love for literature. My passion for stories travels back all the way to when I was a couple of years old. Not long ago, my father told me a story from when I was roughly the age of two. He explained how he had been conversing with me, although I could only speak a few words in response. My father mentioned how when talking with me, he used a word—although, he no longer remembers the word now—that was too advanced for my young vocabulary. While most young toddlers would simply brush it off for lack of understanding, I did not. Rather, I became aggravated and stormed out of the room. He told me I was angry that I did not understand the meaning of the word. In my frustration, I ran to my mother in the kitchen. Telling her what had happened, I repeated the word. Although it was far too advanced for me, I did so without missing a syllable. My father overheard and was nothing short of impressed.

When I was told this story, I was slightly skeptical. It's awfully rare for a young child to be able to perfectly voice such an advanced word—whatever the word may have been—though my father assured me that it was true. "You've always had a knack for words," he stated. *That* part I cannot disagree with. Numbers, on the other hand, now that's a different story. Numbers have been a challenge. I have always dreaded math and science classes. I struggle with understanding the various mathematical concepts. Fractions, integers, factoring—just pondering these words causes me to slightly cringe inside. Yet, I am intrigued by literature and composition.

Susan, a good friend of my family who was also my preschool teacher, told me a somewhat similar story. Susan stated that in preschool, I was infatuated with letters and words. One day, she explained, the class was enjoying free time. Many kids were playing with toy cars and dolls, some painting. Susan noticed that I happened to go up to the book shelf. She expected me to pull a book down and request for one of the teachers to read to me. What I did was something very different. I pulled multiple books down from the shelf. I began to organize the books by the letter in large font on the spine. Each picture book had a letter corresponding to the author's last name. I grouped the As together, then the Bs, followed by Cs, and so on. Susan was taken aback, as this was something not witnessed by many preschool teachers. She later told me that she noticed early on how I was very intrigued by letters and books as a child.

Susan was not the only one. Just as my father and earliest teachers noticed this early on, other adults did as well. My mother did everything she could to encourage my passion for reading and enrich my language skills. Every night, starting around second grade, my mother would read to me before bed. We would lie together, and she would go through series of books such as *Blue's Clues* and *Junie B. Jones*. My mother made reading as fun as possible, always ensuring I had a bowl of ice cream in hand. I began to look forward to my nights of chocolate-chip ice cream and Blue's latest mystery. And soon enough, I began to pair the two together. Books became the delicious chocolate-chip ice cream, as I began to find books just as enjoyable and satisfying. My parents had a mission to ensure that I learned to read well and genuinely loved literature. Mission accomplished.

By middle school, I had taken my gift for literature and was using it in almost any way I could. I joined the School Newspaper club and became a columnist. I was passionate about the interviews I held and the stories I drafted. I thoroughly enjoyed composing my own pieces of literature. My love for reading had expanded itself into a love for writing. I learned that the two were inseparable as they received their value from the other. And when that day came around where I received a letter from the famous Julia Alvarez—who wrote back with as much passion to the letter in which I had poured my heart out—I knew my zeal for literature was definite.

Reflecting on the many stories I have been told by people who fostered my language development, I realize the great impact literature has had on my life. It started with letters, then words, and eventually reading and writing on my own. By second grade, I knew I wanted to be an author. I wanted to create my own stories for an audience to read one day. I loved books and the emotional effect they created. The words great authors transformed into literature could make me feel excited, upset, scared, or even curious. This was something math could never do for me. Numbers could not create an emotional response in me, but on the contrary, stories had that great ability. As I grew, I was constantly desiring to learn and expand my knowledge. I quickly realized that books had the potential for this. Stories and news articles, almost anything that was read to me or I read myself, taught me something. The new knowledge I gained excited me and produced a desire for more. My mother, father, teachers, and many other adults all played a part in fostering this desire, and for that, I am greatly indebted. The literature-loving, knowledge-seeking student I am today is primarily because of these adults who paved the path before me.

Now, sitting in my college dorm room and looking back on these various experiences, I am aware of literature's tremendous impact on my life. Being a college student, I can say how much I value being a literate person. I use words and read pieces of text every day. Literacy is the gift that keeps on giving. It has brought me to where I am today—an individual blessed with the opportunity to receive a college education. Literacy also opens many doors for my future. Having literature in my back pocket, I can achieve just about anything the world puts in front of me. My dream for the future is to attend law school. I aspire to become a lawyer who will use words and language every day in case readings, analyzing documents, and using words to bring justice to clients. Being a pre-law student most definitely feels like an extraordinary commitment. When thinking too much about it, I sometimes become discouraged. I contemplate if law is something far too grand for me. In times of discouragement, I wonder if I should turn down a different path. But in moments like these, all I must do is remind myself where literacy has gotten me today. That in mind, I know the possibilities for my future are truly endless. With literacy, I can do anything.