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Reading: The Starting Line of My Imagination

Writing Process

I asked my parents a few questions about how I learned to read. They started with my dad reading to me while my mom was still pregnant, so that is where I started. Between the questions my parents answered and my own memories, I was able to write about how reading was introduced into my life and what happened as a result.

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Reading: The Starting Line of My Imagination

Daniel Sheldon

The bellowing voice echoed against the dark cavernous walls. The voice's calm and thoughtful expression subdued the deep tympanic and rhythmic beating of my mom's heartbeat. A heartbeat whose constant fluctuation captured the ambience of a world I had not yet known. For months I grew, suspended in amniotic fluid, listening to this voice from beyond. Until I felt a pull, something was happening. Though I tried hard to resist, fighting with every ounce of my being, my safe place, my haven had betrayed me and for the first time in my life, I saw the light and cried. I then heard the voice that had been so deeply ingrained in my mind and I'd soon learn to call him "Dad." While in the womb, my father was the primary narrator to the worlds of fantasy and reality: books and stories. However, both my parents were vital in helping me learn to read. They pushed me to keep reading, using their own unique ways of storytelling: my mom improvised, and my Dad read with great expression. With both my parents feeding my imagination and curiosity through stories, I learned to read.

My mom was an avid reader. She was the one who got in trouble in school and at home for reading too much; it was all she ever did. I was not like that. From about the age of two, I was not a fan of reading. My mom, however, was determined to change my opinion; she tried to get me interested by telling stories, in hopes that I would grow curious enough to read them on my own. She would wait until 8:30 every school night to tell me it was time to go to bed and knowing I would resist every effort she would make to have me fall asleep, she would bribe me with stories. As I would crawl into my bed after having just brushed my teeth, she would tuck me in and begin the story. I was always the protagonist, while my sister was usually my sidekick or in some other supporting role, which I felt suited her because she was annoying and undeserving of any important roles. My mom would draw inspiration from one of my favorite stories, Disney's *The Jungle Book*. Her plots were intricately woven webs, and with no detail spared, I

would hang on her every word. They were action-packed thrillers that centered on the idea of family above all else and that's what made me the happiest; no matter who or what tried to separate us in the story, our family always won.

By the age of six or seven, my Mom's stories had stopped and my dad had taken over. The books he read helped me see that my mom's affinity for reading taught her the parts of a great story: the plot, characters, development, and imagery. When my dad read, he would use a soft and expressive tone; each character came to life in his voice. Whether the books were fantasy or autobiographical, his elaborate use of emphasis and diction added power to his presentation. To keep to a regular schedule, he refrained from reading more than a chapter or two a night. But as that final chapter of the night would come to an end, the inevitable cliffhanger always made me beg him to keep reading. He refused nearly every time but that did not quell my imagination. As I slept, my mind toyed with the characters, plots, and settings, filling in the gaps necessary to finish the story. With each chapter disclosing new information, my imagination was able to further construct its dream into something memorable and unique; I never dreamt the same thing more than once. As we continued to read through more and more books, my dad's voice modulations became a vital tool in helping me differentiate the different characters. As I would close my eyes, and let my bed envelop me, I would listen intently. The most magical thing about the whole process was that, just like when my mom used to tell me stories, I could see the narrative as it reeled forward, playing out like a film in my head. My dad's reading style and voice made every sound rhythmic and soothing: like music.

Ever since I was able to speak, my mother made sure I was reading. She wanted to make sure I was able to read before I got to kindergarten; so that is what I did. She and I would sit down on the couch and I would painstakingly read, or more likely complain, for thirty minutes a day. With each passing minute the page would get longer and longer, and the chapters would never end. Eventually, words would just blur together, and I would give up. My mother spoke highly of how enjoyable reading was for her. However, I could not figure out why; I never found any of the enjoyment she had, and I was tired of trying. I honestly felt as though it was a waste of my time. Even now, knowing its importance, I do not read for pleasure because I find it repetitive and sleep inducing. My mom always said, "When you get to college, you are going to need to know how to read!" I rebutted her statement with, "I know how to read; however, I'm not going to read for fun when it is anything but!" When I did read, it was for school and was out of necessity. Though I hated most of it, I am glad I got the experience because it gave me the knowledge that I need to succeed in life. Even though it was for a grade, reading helped me learn something about myself and experiences. I found

out I best learn aurally and can supplement my learning in a new and different way.

Reading is still hard for me. I can easily get distracted and rarely, if at all, experience any enjoyment from it. However, my discovery that I was an aural learner, allowed me to look back and see my whole reading experience in another light. When my parents read out loud to me as a child, I was able to connect with the story through their voice and my imagination would take flight. My mom's attention to detail and dad's expression helped me experience a world different from my own while still being able to connect the experience back to my reality. Though I agonized over the idea of reading, I later realized, the stories helped teach me who I am and showed me that as long as you wonder and think, the imagination is limitless.