Personal Narrative: Take Two

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Here I am again, enrolled in college courses to work towards the completion of a Bachelor’s Degree. I received two Associate’s Degrees from Lansing Community College almost two decades ago and it has been just as long since I seriously sat down and thought about writing. As my first class at Siena Heights, I needed to complete core requisites in English and Social Science, so I elected for the English course first.

I never really had any trouble writing when I was younger, after all, I come from a time *long ago* where such instruments as notebooks and pencils were a necessity. I had to manually write and rewrite papers, suffering cramps in my hand and wrist. Nowadays, they are discontinuing teaching cursive in schools, I can only assume, because the use of computers deems it largely unnecessary. I wonder how that impacts writing and the desire to write?

As a child, growing up, I wished for a diary, the kind with a little lock to keep peeping eyes at bay. One Christmas, Santa finally delivered. I loved that diary and the false sense of secrecy it allowed me to have. At that age, I could not see the irony that I always kept the keys in the same drawer, slightly tucked under clothes, as if they were really that hard for anyone to find. Every night I would crawl under my covers and write with my flashlight after bedtime, being so sneaky and defiant. When I had allowance money, I would buy pretty glitter-swirl ink pens or colorful calligraphy pens to write with. I would take pride in writing neatly in cursive, every page popped with color and became its own work of art. What would I write? What do ten-year-olds have to write about? I’m sure it was full of insignificant rantings of how unfair it was that my sister got away with one thing or another, or how I *thought* I pined after the boy next door. I wish I knew what happened to that diary, it might be entertaining to reminisce, thumbing through those pages.

My diary was not the only place I would practice putting ink onto paper. I would write to pen pals we would meet on family vacations. Typically, we would go somewhere over spring break and my sister and I would introduce ourselves to children our ages. By the end of the vacation, a matter of five or so days, we were best friends and the idea of ending communication was blasphemy. Tears in our eyes at the impending separation, we would exchange addresses and vow to write to each other forever. In most cases, it did not take long before the subjects became repetitive and the letters ceased to raise enough interest to warrant a return communication.

As I continued to grow older, I kept writing. I found releasing my emotions through the pen to be therapeutic. I had always enjoyed music and singing along with my tapes and it wasn’t long before I experimented with writing my own songs. I cannot help but giggle at the thought of how serious I was about these songs and how many times I forced my sister, two years younger than I, to sit through my performances. Luckily for her, this phase was short-lived, but it lead me to an appreciation of poetry that I am not sure I would have discovered otherwise. One of my vocal heroes released a book of her poetry. It was obscure, deep and thought-provoking. The content quickly expanded my vocabulary and appreciation for expressive writing. I absorbed the book and dissected it all at the same time. It was beautiful.

Upon entering high school, I fell in love with English class. Each class period began with fifteen minutes of free-writing time, a practice to loosen the mind and strengthen the ability to just write without thinking too much about it, similar to a warm-up stretch, preparing your muscles for upcoming physical activity. We explored the works of Shakespeare and were encouraged to get into character as we read along with Romeo & Juliet, Hamlet and Othello to name a few. The “cool kids” rolled their eyes and recited the words in a monotonous tone. That was no fun, so I would always kick it up a notch when it was my turn. I entertained myself envisioning the play coming together in my head and dressing the snarky “cool kids” in period clothing while I read the words with grandiose enthusiasm. Something about the teachers and the topics sparked my creative side and I genuinely grew an interest in the topics we were being taught.

It has been a very long time since I have written anything for pleasure or therapy. I miss the days when I had time to sit down and sketch or write and even though I enjoy both very much, the hustle and bustle of the single-mother adult life demands every ounce of energy I am able to produce. My attention is pulled in varying directions like a competitive game of tug-o-war. I consider myself successful at the end of the day if my child is fed, bathed and I am able to clear the sink of dishes before I succumb to sleep. A monumental stress weighs on my shoulders, knowing as my daughter grows up, the tug-o-war will only continue to swell in intensity. The most common piece of advice that I receive is that I need to make time for myself. Every time someone utters that phrase, I wonder what secret they think I possess that allows bending the laws of physics to “make time.”

At the end of it all, this class, English 341, is only the first of many for the next two years. It is, in all ways, how I am making time for myself. Yes, APA citation is hard, research is hard, proper grammar is hard. I would much rather write for fun, on the topics that I want to write about, but that is not going to grow me as an individual and it is definitely not going to make me a better student. This class was ultimately a fluke that it was chosen first over the Social Science core I need to take, however, it was the perfect one to start my journey. Throughout college, I will need the skills of writing a cohesive paper and citing my resources. Not only is this class is the perfect place for me to remember what it is to write for purpose and to learn those necessary skills of proper citation, but also serves as the beginning of finding myself again, gaining back my confidence and taking charge of where my life is supposed to lead.