Christopher Stuart

Literacy Narrative

My youth was filled with a lot of embarrassment, adventure, frustration, triumph, and pain (both emotional and physical). I had a lot of trouble in school. I remember being in tears after failing countless spelling test, reading comprehension exams, and those goddamn analogy sections of standardized tests. I was that super hyper kid that couldn’t sit still. My mother always called me “rubber band boy” because I was constantly running around and bouncing off the objects I ran into until I split my head open on a metal craft table requiring nearly 60 stitches. Very few things were able to keep me in place for longer than 5 minutes until I discovered videogames. I don’t know what captivated me more, the story I was playing through or the ability to attempt the same “event” in different ways without any repercussions. I wanted to live the life of adventure, but I felt limited in opportunity.

 I remember my first book. It was a brand new paperback with tiny aliens on the cover on a dresser or desk. I don’t remember the title or the author, but I can tell you everything that happens in the story in detail, but I cannot confirm any of it from the actual text, mostly because I never read it. I would use my book light to stare at the pictures on the front and back covers and at the top of each new chapter, creating the story as I went. I was fascinated with books and stories, but I always had a hard time reading. I don’t know if it was Attention Deficit Hyper Disorder or something else, but I could not comprehend anything I read nor could I sit long enough to read anything substantial. I was an extremely slow reader which was/is a great frustration of mine. My mind is always racing in a million directions when I read, especially if it is a story a greatly enjoy, making it difficult to speed through a text. I would have my parents buy me new books whenever we were at the mall or if the school was having their annual Scholastic book fair, but the books would just sit on my shelf, untouched, but their untold stories filled my head with lust.

 I realized this was a problem in elementary school, but I was too stubborn to ask for help. I rejected the school’s proposals to send me to a speech class, hold me back in the third grade, and after school help. I cried when I would come home with D’s and C’s while my older brother was in honors and never studied for his A’s. It wasn’t until I discovered Shel Silverstein’s “Falling Up” that I understood reading and writing. See, I had an overactive imagination which kept me in fear of darkness and silence my entire life. I blame this on “Unsolved Mysteries”, movies (Child’s Play?), and the video games I would play, but it has also served me well in academia. “Falling Up” was an amazing illustrated poetry book that was playful but also dark like my imagination. To read these poems made me feel whole. After this discovery, I went into overdrive with playing role-playing video games and writing my own stories and poems.

 Once I made it into middle school, I was welcomed into the world of story completion by Mr. Cooper. The first full novel I remember reading was Eli Wiesel’s “Night”. I was so moved by the language and the visuals that played in my head that I was actually able to put ideas into a formal assignment. I received my first “A” and I couldn’t have been more proud of myself. In high school, I was pushed into more novels and stories by Mr. Lorenzo and Mr. Brown which broadened my love of fiction which was eventually harnessed in my writing of short stories and novel length adventures under the tutelage of Ms. Park. I once made a utopian society seem so real that my teacher failed me because she thought I copied my ideas out of textbook. Proving to her I made it all up was utter delight. I wanted to use my words in other ways so I joined in on mock trials and debates, eventually fast-tracking to become a lawyer (which I decided against in my sophomore year).

 It wasn’t until my junior year of college that I found my love of reading. I always loved reading, but I rarely picked up books on my own to read. I came late into the Harry Potter series, Lord of the Rings, Percy Jackson, and others. I would hear groups of people talking about Harry on campus and would push myself into the group to listen and give my 2 cents. I never saw cliques or groups, I just saw people with similarities and opportunities to learn new things. I surrounded myself with students from film studies, creative writing, literature, and law. My senior advisor laughed when she saw my diverse education and the ability to declare several minors in addition to my English major. Once I started to understand how my brain worked, I pushed myself in every direction to learn more.

In high school, I eventually pushed myself into writing nearly every day, whether it is creative or non-, it didn’t matter, which continued through and after college. I felt like after so many years of frustration, I was finally able to concentrate my efforts and focus my mind onto individual tasks. Even though I still struggle with remember names, characters, vocabulary, dates, lyrics, etc., I know my shortcomings and I make the best of it. I look at my embarrassments and fears and use them as motivation to be better or help others. I’ve had several instructors/teachers that have helped me through my issues, but many remain no matter how hard I try, but I now understand them. I want to use my experience with frustration and the encouragement I have received over the years to help other students find the enjoyment in something that can be seen as frustrating and foreign to many.