

# ***Je Ne Sais...Meh***

GRACIE MIEVES

WR 121, Winter 2020

---

I learned what reading and writing meant to me at very different times in my life. No, I don't mean I was partially illiterate until my first year of college. I mean that my learning journey and personal literacy growth didn't happen until later in my life. My reading story begins at the tender age five in my kindergarten class. We had this absolutely horrid alphabet song. I can still hear it "Ay-Ah-Alligator, Bee-Buh-Butterfly, Cee-Cuh-Cat...". It sounded like some demented horror twins inviting me to play mixed with like a ritualistic summoning. The teacher always wore her hair in a severe bun with one lip always glued to her nose in disdain, like little children had the plague or smelled of formaldehyde. The children were akin to wild stallions, and the mustard brown walls made me feel like I was being buried alive in a seventies themed coffin. A lot of dark thoughts for a kindergartener, right? Well I guess that was just me. I preferred to see only the darker things in existence.

I wasn't messed up as a child; I promise it was just my grandparents' fault. They were born in 1945 and were married by the time they had turned eighteen. They had children in the golden age of "boys are perfect" and "girls need to be silenced". To put it simply, they preferred boys. When my parents got married at age nineteen and they had

a kid, my grandparents lost their collective mind. The only grandchildren they had at the time were my older teenage cousins who are triplet boys. So instead of my grandparents treating me like they had treated their daughters, they decided to treat me like the dark princess they wanted me to be. They gave me free reign to be as expressive and defiant as I wanted to be. We learned the cursed alphabet song and that was when I officially learned the alphabet. I think I hated that song mostly because it forced me into some disgusting happy box. I had seen the role models in my life all have cheery and cosmetic relationships with literacy and the idea of being sickeningly superficial was not how I wanted to start my life. Later that year my grandfather bought me the best gift I could ever ask for, my start to literacy. He bought me the book *Are You My Mother?*. I remember him giving me the book and helping me to highlight the words I couldn't sound out. I guess one could say that my grandparents were my first sponsors of literacy. They along with my parents let me watch and ingest any media I wanted. My parents being relative teenagers took me to see the *Saw* movies and *Scary Movie* series. If you're familiar with either of these series, you would know that they are not suitable for young minds. All in all I felt very overloaded with all kinds of sensory details, I had no need to imagine things. Life was bleak. At least that is what I thought as a young child. I didn't have an imagination.

Anyway, I lost that book much later in my literacy journey. So, I guess it served its purpose as a catalyst then it moseyed on out of my life. I don't remember a whole lot about how I learned to read, but I do have one moment permanently ingrained in my mind. I had just gotten out of a nice warm shower, and it was quiet time with my parents. I

was curled into my mother's side. The fluffy couch was radiating heat because of the roaring fire in the modest living room. My mother was stroking my hair as I began to read to myself. I was immediately transported to this beautiful world. I could see happy little fairies defending their sister in arms from those cute little goblins. I could smell the fresh cut grass and feel the sunbeams radiating down on my face. I remember feeling like the whole world went silent. Is this what love should feel like? When my mother snapped me from my reverie, I just smiled. I think this is what you could say sparked my imagination.

Although I learned physically how to write at a standard age, I certainly did not love it. I loved being in my own world... that someone else provided. Given my experience as a tiny adult (I've been washing my own laundry since I turned seven), I've had an interesting time coming to terms with writing. In elementary school my teachers would write that I needed more elaboration, more effort, and more something I didn't know I had. I remember coming home some days feeling broken and tears streaming down my face. I wanted to be like the writers I had fallen in love with. I tried everything everyone suggested to help fix my lack of imagination, but every single time my mind came up blank I felt the crushing weight of inadequacy. My teachers misunderstood me and tried implementing the rule 'expect the most of the child and they will expect it of themselves'. All this did was give me a sense of insecurity and shame as I moved into middle school.

I was fortunate enough to get into a prestigious performing arts middle school. I was behind everyone else in just about every subject. I would like to say I had some magical breakthrough in these three years; alas, I didn't. My teachers during this time

force fed me the idea that you must follow a rigid writing process: flow chart, draft, revision, final draft. The more they tried to give me this cookie cutter idea, the more I rebelled. I would only turn in first drafts for everything.

With this skewed view of writing I was thrust into high school. I can safely say that this helped my love for reading. We had a huge library with many different genres of books. I quickly became the book club president. With this position I was introduced to some beautiful poetry and short stories (we adore Robert Frost). One day I decided to pick a short story prompt and just run with it. I must have sat at the blank computer screen for so many hours. I then proceeded to pour what I thought were amazing things on to the page. They were absolute rubbish. This would hold true for the next four years; I would do all writing excited and then proceed to be frustrated almost instantly. I hated my writing process and my own self-perception.

My most recent stop on my writing journey is here and now. Specifically, my writing 121 class. I remember before coming into the class that I told myself that we were just going to run with whatever the teacher said and just suffer through whatever absolute hell they were going to throw at me. We were learning the writing process options, and it finally just clicked. It was like a motorcycle engine finally turned over. I had gas, and the engine was primed and ready to run. I just needed to give it that extra push. Now I can't believe that I actually love writing so much that I am writing my own short stories on top of this essay.

From an outsider's perspective my literacy story isn't something epic. It's actually quite simple, but who ever said simple was bad? Shame on them; it is beautiful. My literacy love didn't come all at once, but I am perfectly okay with that. I have been through the absence of creativity, the frustration of hardheaded teachers, and the soul crushing pain of inadequacy. In the end, I am exactly where I need to be, but never where I thought I could go. Let us see how far imagination can take me.

## **Author Bio**

Gracie Meives is a first-year student studying American Sign Language/English interpreting. Her plans include to graduate and work as an Interpreter in Washington state. Her passions include learning all that she can from life's lessons, going on adventures in nature, swing dancing, and peanut butter. Her motto in life is "Just try it and see where it takes you."